

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

By

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Spotlights

In the main text of this volume I have inserted several Excursus, designated as Spotlights. They are designed to shed additional light on pertinent issues that are mentioned but might need further elaboration for clarity sake. But they also serve an even more significant objective. Hopefully, they will succeed in making the main argument of this volume persuasively intelligible. They are also to bolster this argument in the hope that it will lead to the “practical godliness” which does and should inevitably go with it, if it is truly understood and embraced as God’s truth!

In Scripture truth that is not acted upon is not only “dead capital” (Tit. 1:1). It leaves a potential trail of death in its wake, however much it may seem or be alive “as is” (Jam. 1:19-25). This is argued in practical detail at several instances in the text of this publication to give it some concrete feet. In Scripture those who embrace God’s truth experience this not only as a “safe haven” (John 14:6; 2 Pet. 1:12), but also as “the pavement” (2 Pet. 2:2) of the “highway of holiness” (2 Ki. 20:3; Ps. 86:11; 119:30; Is. 35:8; John 3:21; 3 John 3-4.) on which to walk, if not continuously to run (1 Cor. 9:24, 6; 2 Tim. 4:7) to obtain the price, “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8).

A godly “run” is at the same time an inevitable “fight” (2 Tim. 2:3). At times “defeat” may stare us in the face (2 Cor. 1:8). At times “persecution” may strike a blow (2 Thess. 1:4). At times “affliction” may knock on the door (2 Tim. 1:8; 3:11). But, at all times, the “march” is dotted with victories of whatever kind (such as, in 2 Cor. 1:5; 2:14; 3:18; 4:8-12, 17; 7:5-11; 8:1-6; 2 Tim. 2:10) through him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13) until the final victory is certain to be obtained (Rom. 8:37-39; Cor. 15:57).

Both the multi-faceted and multi-phased “run” is governed, and the beckoning and grand “outcome” guaranteed by our Immutable God. What better reasons do we need to get to know him in this Immutability based on the two principles of *Sola Scriptura* and *Tota Scriptura*, which were so heartily embraced by the Reformation as the twofold exclusive foundation stone of all true knowledge?¹ All, to get a better handle on “the run” and to gain, retain, or regain the assurance of the “outcome!” In fact, there is a powerful incentive to study and embrace God’s Immutability and its concordant Practical Godliness from the data of Scripture alone (*sola*) and in full (*tota*), without contamination from outside sources or influences. After all, who wants to take the risk of “running in vain?” Everybody is always “running” in one way or another and for one thing or another! Who wants to fail in locating the “truth-paved highway of holiness?” Who wants to miss running on it? Who wants to collapse on it or crash off it? In the process of all this, who wants to forego the Grand Finale?

¹ Regrettably, the near universal consensus of the “children of the Reformation” in endorsing the *Sola* is all too often shattered when it comes down to the *Tota*. Historically, differences in interpretation did and do abound on all levels of Christ’s Church, denominationally, locally, as well as personally. Hopefully, the Spotlights will facilitate, if not expand one’s look at the *Tota* in the present context, and effect at least a growing consensus for it to result in an increasing animus jointly to lay “our hands on the plough” to pursue the mission that Christ entrusted to us and mandated for us.

Clearly, the stakes are extremely high! Hence the decision to insert Spotlights. It is my hope that they will serve their purpose.

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Spotlight I: The “How of the Universe” and the “Why of History”

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Preface

The present Volume was originally meant to be submitted to a Committee of the Presbytery of the Southwest of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as an *Amicus Curiae* brief in the form of a relatively short statement pertaining to a controversy that arose regarding the Biblical and Confessional Doctrine of the Immutability of God. But by the time this statement neared completion, the issue in the Presbytery was resolved by what I could call a “Statement of Creedal Orthodoxy” (June 22, 2020) on the part of the individual who was under investigation.² Nevertheless, two reasons led to the determination to proceed with this enlarged publication. The “statement” did not contain a “detailed refutation of identified errors.” These errors simply must be addressed. Further, the issue is much wider than the view of one individual, and as such this must be covered in full. As a result, the present undertaking turned into a much longer volume than originally planned. But it seemed time and again that there was more, much more at stake than at first met the eye. It pertains to a Doctrine that greatly and seriously divides the theological landscape as well as the ecclesiastical world. Hence the extent of this volume in the hope that it may serve a better grasp of the Biblical truth in this matter and so promote peace among those who spar about its content, but above all produce a united front in practical hands-on ministry (John 13:35). After all, the *practice* of godliness is what ultimately counts (1 Tim. 6:2-3; Tit. 1:1).³ The pursuit of biblical truth without an equal pursuit of obedient action is heart- and self-delusional (Jam. 1:19-27).

Of course, this volume seeks to do justice to the divergent views by spelling them out in detail. But it also does and must deal with the roots, analyze and assess the underlying commitments that led to these views.⁴ In all candor, it may well be that these underlying realities are not even recognized by their proponents, whether in whole or in part.⁵

² What set the Presbytery investigation in motion were the challenged views of K. Scott Oliphint on Divine Immutability, set forth, a.o., in his publication, *God With Us* (2012). This volume has been withdrawn and is no longer available. But the views espoused in it are in the public domain, and still need to be addressed, especially since in the “Statement of Creedal Orthodoxy,” sent out by the President of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, these views were repudiated “for the good and peace of the Church (Rom. 12:18), and (merely) characterized as “no longer helpful” without any reference to their truth value, or lack thereof!

³ See for this, Maastricht, TTP, I, 63-112, esp. 71-73, 79, 86-98, 107-112.

⁴ This is, in a “Tertullian” like fashion. More about Tertullian in the course and Postscript of this Volume!

⁵ All Christian thinkers who weigh in on the Doctrine of Divine Immutability, whether “pro” or “con,” believe that the Bible is on their side. Scripture supposedly endorses the view they hold. This motivates them to stick to their guns. At times (frequently?) it is even the starting gate from which they argue their point. But many (most?) of them use a philosophical “handmaiden,” whether of the Ancient Philosophical, Platonic, Aristotelian or Plotinian variety, or of the Modern Philosophical, Kantian, Hegelian, Heideggerian or Analytic sort. See for this especially, D. Stephen Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) who provides us with an excellent and detailed historical sketch of both “the general lay of the Immutability/Mutability land” and the underlying patterns of thought. Frankly, it is precisely the several “handmaidens” that must get our careful and critical attention in order to look into “underlying commitments” that may shape the various views and their defense, whether consciously or not. Once these “commitments” are identified, can they stand the light of Scripture? If not, what are the implications for the views that they produced or helped produce, inclusive of the apologetics that came to their defense.

At any rate, purposefully in line with Deuteronomy 29:29 that warns against any attempt to penetrate the impenetrable by puzzling out the “secrets” of God and instead commands us to obey what he has revealed in his Law, the aim of this volume is twofold. It is, for one, to stay within the creaturely limitations determined by God in its focus upon Divine Immutability, and the closely related Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, which needs to receive our close attention as well. That is, not to cross the line of Divinely established human jurisdiction. To do so comes dangerously close to willful disobedience, the same rebellious type of disobedience that prompted Adam to grab for the fruit of the Forbidden Tree in order to become “god-like” in determining his own knowledge and conduct. It is, further, not to be content with “pure theology.” It desires not merely to define the Doctrine and to come to its defense, but above all to emphasize what it takes to lodge it in our hearts, to treasure it, and to display it in the active “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 15:16; 16:26) that does and must flow forth from it (Ps. 119:11). The more humans are busy “plumbing” what is *concealed* of and by God, the less they are occupied to “pursue” what is *revealed* of and by him.

Frankly, the concern to keep the latter ever in the forefront of our “thinking” (theology) and “acting” (practical godliness), coupled with the fear for the consequences of the failure or refusal to prioritize this, constitutes the “heartbeat” of this volume. Both this concern and this fear are perennially apropos in the light of Scriptures, such as Psalm 77 in the OT and Revelation 2 and 3 in the NT. The Psalmist is simultaneously a “broken” and a “hopeful” man. He is a “broken” man in the face of the devastating judgment of God (The Exile?) upon Israel’s rebellious refusal to pursue what was “revealed.” Please, read and re-read the verses 1-9, plumb the depth of his fully justified despair, and let it sink in. Then take steps to join him, whether in whole or even in part to start with! Here in the West Christianity is increasingly dismantled. Theological commitment to an inerrant Scripture is on the wane, practical Church attendance shows a continuing downgrade, and the ongoing secularization of society is alarming. It is not too difficult to see the steady increase of “exilic” conditions. So, every reason to join the Psalmist in full and to have sleepless nights.. But that same Psalmist is also equally “hopeful.” Read and re-read the verses 10-20, climb the height of his fully rocklike certainty, and rejoice. He pins his hope, really on the awesome “immutability,” together with its underlying “simplicity,” of the Almighty God of Moses and Aaron. And ... was this hope ever vindicated in “the fullness of time!” No need to enlarge here on the First Coming of the Christ as he displayed his Kingship (greater than Moses) and his Priesthood (greater than Aaron) as the Lion-Lamb in his Cross and Resurrection (Rev. 5:5-6)! But there does seem to be a great need to emphasize that the Psalmist mirrors our Lord in his diagnostic assessments in Revelation 2 and 3. John must have been appalled when he heard in retrospect the analysis of the Churches that had been entrusted to his oversight. He may well have asked himself, “Did I miss something? Apparently, I did!” Yes, there is the glorious stamp of approval upon two of the Churches, which spells “hope.” The gates of hell cannot and will not ever stop the victorious march of the Church (Mt. 16:18). The simplicity and immutability of Almighty God on display in his Trinitarian being, his plan, his words, and his actions guarantee this. But, without going into details, the threat of a pending “exile” upon some of the other Churches is equally evident. Since this seems to be the pattern of all of Church History, there is every reason for God’s people, in the footsteps of the Psalmist and as graduates from the School of Christ, to be perennially filled both with “concern” and “fear” (Heb. 12:28-29), and buoyant “hope” and “expectation” (Rom. 5:2-5; 8:24-25). Not so

incidentally, no one should miss the fact that the Asia Minor Churches in John's days that seem to be doing fine, or are doing half-fine, are denied that "hope" and "expectation" without heartfelt and fruit-bearing repentance, while the Churches that seem to have no "future" are told to be brimful with "hope" and "expectation."

Upon scanning the OT testimony of the Psalmist and the seven NT letters of Christ some more, two observations may be in place. The first one pertains to the OT. It is rather clear from the OT Psalm that "the war" appeared lost. Elijah certainly thought so (1 Ki. 19:9-10). But the Psalmist hung on to God. So does Lamentations (Lam. 3:19-25). But in the latter context there was no *observable* light at the end of the tunnel. The graphic concluding verses of Lamentation only verify this (Lam. 5:21-22). Please, don't miss that in the conditions that prevailed in his time these verses bring the author's "final" thoughts to expression. The obviously continuing "hope" (and necessarily his prayer as well) does not eliminate the *total* "brokenness" of his heart and life, while recognizing and admitting the possibility of God's "utter (fully deserved) rejection in his exceeding anger."⁶

The NT scenario presented in the Seven Letters is somewhat different. We encounter "victory" as well as "defeat," even within the very bosom of some of the Churches. "All is not necessarily well" within their confines. Since by near-general consensus Christ "tests" the Seven Churches as a representation or replica of the universal Church, the conclusion must be that "celebration" and "brokenness," always should go hand in hand. Whether the Seven Asia-minor Churches constitute a "District" (Pentecostal), a "Diocese" (Anglican), a "Convention" (Congregational), a "Classis" (Reformed), or a "Presbytery" (Presbyterian), they are clearly not totally, let alone radically independent. After all, Christ stands in between them as a cluster of churches, holds their individual leadership in one hand, and has them collectively addressed by John as his intermediary and their apostolic supervisor. As such they are clearly interdependent. From this vantagepoint it is utterly understandable for local Churches to celebrate "battles won," whether in their midst or in their fellow Churches. But it is equally necessary for them to be heart and life "broken" when the war appears to be lost, or the threat of losing it looms large, whether in their own locality or in that of the others. This threat is evidently perennial. So, the joyful "celebration" of "battles won," and the sobering lamentation about "wars lost" in heartfelt "brokenness" whether curative or

⁶ Anna, still in the OT dispensation, may well have mirrored this. She entered the Temple upon the death of her husband of seven years, and arguably spent fifty years there, praying night and day with fasting. More than anyone else in her generation she must have seen the unfathomable darkness of her nation. Hence, she went "homeless," "sleepless," and "foodless," apart from the minimum necessities of life, to plead with God for the Promised Redeemer to come as the only antidote for a "lost war" (Lk. 2:37-38).

preventive, should always go hand in hand in every Church at any time, if, in addition to Revelation 2 and 3, Nehemiah 8-13⁷ as well as Church History⁸ are any indication!⁹

Whether readers of this volume will (come to) agree with everything that is written thus far or in what follows is one thing. Folks may disagree with each other and inevitably will do so at times. But the sting is gone as long as they share the “heartbeat” of the afore-mentioned perennial “concern” and “fear,” marked by an undivided and undividable focus upon and pursuit of the mandated “ethics” that is “revealed” as well as the rocklike “hope” and “expectation” that such focus and pursuit will be honored in a practical godliness by the grace of God. So, my prayer is that this volume will advance an ever-increasing presence of “Practical Godliness” by the people of God under the smile of God to the glory of God. Disagreeing brothers and sisters can still be “friends” when they jointly march together toward this beckoning target. They do not always wear the *identical* suit. In fact, (it may well be that) they rarely do. Incidentally, while “companions” share “activities” that are enjoyable, true “friends” share “objectives” whatever the cost in terms of time and energy to reach them. Refusal to pay the recognized and required “price” and go the distance no matter what, is most likely the major reason why authentic friendships are rare, often terminate, sometimes shatter, and at times end up in hostilities. In the light (read: darkness) of this, it is incumbent upon all God’s children to abound in prayer for authentic biblical “friendship” to blossom, if not “cover the territory” in the Church of Christ to help ensure that its march of ongoing and at time excruciating battle ends up in the destination of everlasting and unalloyed victory!

In a few words, this volume has two objectives.

Negatively, it seeks not to plumb the “secrets” of the Divine “essence” of his being and actions that are either incomprehensible or forbidden territory. In fact, it is consistently critical of and warns against making the incomprehensible intelligible. In this context, it identifies authors who may have stepped over the line in their publications, whether in whole or in part, by name and surname. As in any context, it may not and should not be a “respector of persons.” God’s Word must remain in total charge. After all, “the best of man is and remains man at best.” Of course, the present author is not perfect either. So, we will have to wait and see how a “critical stance” will play out.

Positively, it aims to identify and detail the Divine “ethics” that is indisputably revealed. In fact, it consistently counsels to pursue it individually and jointly in authentic “friendship.”¹⁰ Of course, “ethics” here is understood to be the unquestionably and fully

⁷ This is in evidence in Neh. 8-10. The “joy” of Neh. 8:1-18, esp. 10, was accompanied by, if not resulted in the “brokenness” of Neh. 9:1-37, and “a battle won” in Neh. 10:1-12:47 which ended in joy. However, neither the “brokenness” nor the “joy” lasted long. All the gains were wiped out and had to be reinstated again in Neh. 13:1-31. There is every reason to be on the alert for the ever-looming threat of “the war lost.” No wonder that the Psalmist prays that Revival times will not see the “revived” return to “Folly” (Ps. 85:8). Apparently, he feared that this could happen at “the drop of a hat.” Our Lord Jesus diagnosed this in Rev. 2-3, and Church History demonstrates that this is “par for the course.” The Church better be utterly sober in its joy and utterly joyful in its sobriety. To tilt is sooner or later to go off the deep end.

⁸ Church History may well be designated as a History of new Start-ups!

⁹ This “twofold” emotion also comes into play at the First Coming of our Lord Jesus. It spells unmitigated “Joy to the World” (Lk. 2:14). But this does and must go hand in hand with an equally unmitigated “sorrow” that “the world did not ‘get it,’” and that “his own did not welcome him” (John 1:10-11).

¹⁰ This should not come as a surprise. Twice Paul informs Timothy that the proper teaching of God’s inerrant Word immediately leads to, if not goes hand in hand with “reproof” and “correction,” even with “rebuke” and “exhortation,”

revealed body of God's mandates that addresses God's man in the totality of his existence, alerts him of God's purposes for them, gives shape to his heart to pursue them with all his might, and directs him in the entirety of his undertakings, which includes the road to arrive at God's target. The latter brings the way of one's theologizing into immediate view, whether systematic apologetic or otherwise. Any attempt even to "sniffle" at God's "secrets" I define as "theo-ontology." Any failure explicitly to bring God's "ethics" into the picture, I define as "mere theology."

Two realities have become increasingly clear to me. To the extent theo-ontology rules the roost time and energy wise, the pursuit of Divine "ethics" cannot but be compromised. It ends up as a "caboose," if not a left-over, at best. Further, as long as theology spells out the substance of truth *merely* to satisfy the correctness of doctrine and fails to spell out the practice of truth in detail, it regrettably will not concretely affect the latter much, if at all. If it merely manages to produce, at times sharp differences of opinion, it would at best come down as a "verbal tempest in a mental teapot." In addition to overlooking or ignoring the practice of obedience, such would create a rift among brothers who should be partners (friends!) in a united front, march as a coherent army, and rivet their eyes on a shared target! I am sure that we will all agree that this would be sad and should be saddening, to say the least, and much more than likely, does (and should) produce guilt and shame before God. My corollary observation is that the more extensive and sophisticated the efforts are to explore God's "secrets," and to make them intelligible, the more the pursuit of God's "ethics" tends to fall by the wayside.¹¹ One cannot fill a vacuum twice. Time and energy spent in one's intense preoccupation in one area cannot be spent elsewhere.

A 14th Century author already called attention to this and spelled it out, possibly in heartfelt dismay about the type of theologizing (scholasticism?) that was awash in the Church of Christ preceding and during his time-period. He puts the following words in the mouth of Jesus, "Woe to those who inquire of men about many curious things, and care very little about the way they serve Me." And: "Beware of curious and vain examination ... A pious and humble search for truth God will allow a search that is ever ready to learn and that seeks to walk in the reasonable doctrine of the fathers. Best is the simplicity that leaves the difficult way of dispute and goes forward on the level, firm path of God's commandments. Many have lost devotion because they wished to search into things beyond them."¹² Both quotations

be it with "complete patience" and "lucid instruction" (2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2). Apparently, Paul is fully aware of the potential pitfalls in the teaching/learning process for both "speakers" (failure to reprove, etc.) and "hearers" (failure to comply).

¹¹ In all this I found a (rare?) kindred trailblazing "forebear" in Maastricht, TPT, I, 66, 69, 78-79, 90, 95-103, 106-107, 109-112. Based on 1 Tim. 6:2c-3 (and Tit. 1:1), he shows the biblical link between "teaching" and "exhorting" (application) as it comes to expression in "doctrine (truth) according to godliness." Hence, he proposes a definition of theology in which "theory" and "practice" are indissolubly and perpetually intertwined. It is "best defined as the doctrine of (experiential and practical) living for God through Christ (by means of the Spirit and the Word)" (with further reference to John 13:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16). Both "bare theology" and an unproductive life that is not "preeminently practical" should be shunned. The way he unpacks his (simple) definition in great details is impressive and exemplary. I question one significant omission in his writings. But more about this below.

¹² Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), 90, 139. I am well aware that the author raises his alarm first in general (90), and subsequently in a specific doctrinal area (139), namely that of the sacramentology of his day in its focus upon and view of the Lord's Supper. But this alarm is clearly applicable to every doctrine, such as that of the Trinity, which he singles out as a case in point in the opening statement on page 1 of his volume. Further, the assumption of his possible (likely?) dismay about the ecclesiastical situation of his day

sternly reprove the transgression of Deuteronomy 29:29a and strongly urge the pursuit of Deuteronomy 29:29b.

At any rate, in the two objectives of this volume one may detect a yearning to see a paradigmatic shift in focus in the theological enterprise, wherever this proves to be needful, a shift from a forbidden preoccupation with “divine essence” or a truncated preoccupation with “pure theology,” to the pursuit of “divine *ethics*,” that is, to “biblical-truth-*unto-life*,” a “godly *walk* in the Word,” “Learning-*unto-Living*,” or to any similarly current “graphic mantras.” Such shift will and should be monumental in as much as it will affect all “areas” and “expressions” of Christianity, including the proclamation of God’s Word as the first and foremost means of grace, whether in teaching, counseling, or for that matter in evangelism and apologetics. To yearn for such shift is to follow in the footsteps of the passionate Apostle Paul (Rom. 9:2; 10:1; Phil. 3:18), and therefore should be both passionate and characterize everyone. In his Romans he warns against theo-ontology with a vengeance (Rom. 9:14-20) and brackets his total imposing doctrinal edifice by the practice of the “obedience of faith” from start (Rom. 1:5) to finish (Rom. 16:26). In short, he tells us, “For one, don’t ‘pry’ into God’s secrets, but delight in them (Rom. 11:33-36)! For another, if you don’t begin and end with ‘obedience,’ you have not understood a word of what I am getting it with all the glorious doctrines that I cover (Rom. 15:16).” They are truths-*unto-life*, a life of practical godliness and holiness. To miss this is to miss everything. Neither a questionable preoccupation with “essence,” nor with “*mere* theology” will do. The former should be eliminated, tooth and nail, and the latter elevated until it soars, both at all cost. It is my ardent prayer that the present volume serves this twofold purpose.

Frankly, to honor the “secrets” of God it is mandatory to recognize the Biblical reality of the complementarity of truth. In the present context, truth is complementary when it consists of two components that cannot possibly be explained by the finite human mind. In physics the incomprehensible nature of light is such truth. It is both and simultaneously (and harmoniously!) a wave and a particle, which is baffling to the human mind and openly recognized as unexplainable.¹³ We simply live with this “ontological” fact. We enjoy it, work with it, see how it functions ... and leave it further alone. However, the incomprehensible “ontological secrets” of God, the ones pertaining to his being, we do not simply “leave alone.” We are *commanded* to stay away from them.¹⁴ To “pry” into them would be arrogant, if not rebellious. In short, any “probing how,” the “how” of these secrets, for whatever purpose and in whatever form, is, by definition, out of bounds. There are also *forbidden* “epistemological secrets,” the ones pertaining to God’s actions, actions that he keeps for himself. We are told to stay away from them as well. Here any “inquiring why,” the “why” of these secrets, for whatever reason and in whatever way, is also out of bounds! Obedience in both areas require a “child-like” heart that worshipfully and joyfully surrenders, at times in repentance, to both the incomprehensibility and the sovereignty of God, if Scripture is any indication (Ps. 131:1-2; Job 42:1-6).

may well come to expression when in the same opening statement he exclaims that to be fully conversant in “the principles of all the philosophers” amounts to “vanities of vanities” if “we live without grace and the love of God.” The heavy speculative use of philosophy in Medieval scholasticism is a well-attested fact.

¹³ The same applies to the polar relationship of the General Theory of Relativity and Quantum Physics. Albert Einstein was analytically baffled by it. Stephen Hawking sought synthetically to explain it. Stephen Ford, a Chaos scientist, decided simply to live with it. See for this Henry Krabbendam, *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, SR, 124-139.

¹⁴ This is the import of Paul’s admonition in Rom. 9:20-24. He simply tells a protagonist to “shut up” for his own life’s sake and offers a counter challenge to have him opt for this!

Just as frankly, to grasp the full-orbed content of God's spelled out "ethics" in the NT times it is not sufficient merely to focus upon the Mosaic Torah as this is "inimitably" done in Psalm 119. To be sure, the Mosaic Law remains in full force (Mal. 4:4).¹⁵ But *after* Pentecost the Church's "ethics" must start and finish with Christ's Triple Command of (1) "making disciples of all nations" through the Eternal Gospel and following (2) "baptizing them in the name of the Triune God," of (3) "teaching them to observe whatever God commands" in his Inerrant Word. Of course, the Mosaic Law with its Decalogue is encapsulated in the third prong. But the first and second prong are indispensable for the third one to have a "ghost of a chance," referring, of course, to the Holy Ghost! Figuratively speaking, the Church does (and must) "sit at the feet of Jesus" (Lk. 11:39) and does (and must) "wash the feet of Jesus" (John 12:3), when it prayerfully and energetically does (and must) pursue "souls" (Mt. 6:10a; 28:19) and "holiness" (Mt. 6:10b; 28:20) as "the only thing needful" (Lk. 11:42). This also is (and will be) the only (threefold) thing that will be remembered and talked about throughout Church History (Mt. 26:13), and possibly beyond. Indisputably, "the only thing needful, recorded, remembered, and talked about in the Judgment!" Hence, every Sunday the Pulpit should ask the Pew at the start of every Worship Service, "What is the only thing needful, and why?" The Pew, then, intones like clockwork, "Making Disciples, Baptizing them, and Teaching them Unreserved Obedience ... by Order of the Commander-in-Chief."¹⁶ Then the Pulpit can respond, "Alright, let's get on with the Worship Service, that is, with the Gospel and the Word, so that you can make them first flesh and blood for yourself and then share them with others."¹⁷

Since Matthew 28:19-20 is the *exclusive* blueprint mandated for the Church to implement, it should be crystal that all theological undertakings must seek and serve to make, facilitate, or enhance the Commander's Triple Command as its grand and magnificent obsession. This also applies to any, and all theological undertakings that focus on Divine Immutability. Failure consciously, persistently and vigorously in any such undertaking to aim at this "obsession" is bound to put a noose around the Church's neck with all that this entails for time and eternity.¹⁸ After all, most of us are acquainted with the threefold

¹⁵ That is, apart from its fulfillment in the New Covenant as it is promised by the Father, personified in the Son, and personalized by the Holy Spirit. The Civil Law, inclusive of the penal sanctions was fulfilled and set aside by the Father when he focused the New Covenant upon the Church to be recruited as a spiritual entity from among all nations apart from the nation of Israel as a political entity. The Church no longer needs to be sanitized by Civil Authorities, such as in the OT. It now sanitizes itself through excommunication. The Symbolic Law was fulfilled and came to an end in the Son when he turned prefiguring "shadows" into substantive light. The Holiness Law was fulfilled and came into its own when the Son brought it to full expression preparing it for the Holy Spirit to write it on regenerate hearts to produce obedient lives.

¹⁶ We will begin to grasp and appreciate the glory and incisiveness of the Marching Order by our Commander-in-Chief, when we insert his Triple Command in the text of Psalm 119 each time it refers to God's Law, which is in every verse but two! Sooner or later, it will (must!) turn in our delight and engender in us a desire to experience it to the full!

¹⁷ Even if they do not particularize this in terms of Christ's Triple Command, the indispensable necessity for incessant "calls to action" is underscored by R. L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), esp. 30, 40, 52; and Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 479, "God uses the Bible not merely to inform but to instruct readers in the way of righteousness ... The Bible is a divinely authored compendium of practical wisdom that calls not only for conceptual elaboration but for performance." For the lively and perennial debate about the relationship between the theoretical and practical, see also Muller, PRDP, I, 215-226; Turretin, IET, I, 20-23. More about this below.

¹⁸ The totality of Paul's impressive theological edifice in his Epistle to the Romans is bracketed by "the obedience of faith." It sets him in motion to put this edifice together (Rom. 1:5) and puts this edifice together it to arrive at it (Rom.

warning, “Evangelize or Fossilize,” “Cascade or Dehydrate,”¹⁹ and “Sanctify or Petrify.” This warning does and should serve as “An Alarm to the Converted” to be sounded, if not to

16:26). His hands-on ministry is woven of the same cloth. As a slave of Jesus Christ, God the Son, he uses the Gospel of God the Father to make his audience acceptable to God, sanctified by God the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). This is behind the statement that all of theology must be explicit in its aim and zeal to bind Christ’s Triple Grand Command on the heart of his people and to exhort them, daily in case of need (Hebr. 3:13a), to have this or make this their driving force in word and deed! Lack of exhortation invariably starts a hardening process by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebr. 3:13b). Since Gospel “out-reach” and Word “in-reach” are *commands* (Mt. 28:19-20), they are both components of a believer’s sanctification. Consequently, to be “lukewarm” in the pursuit of this twofold sanctification, is fraught with a spine-chilling danger. “Who wants to be spat out (Rev. 3:16)?” Frankly, among the authors who properly “theorized” about the indispensable need for “the practical,” I did not find even one who stated, let alone emphatically insisted that practical Christianity also includes perennial and unwavering obedience to the first part of Christ’s Triple Command. This is also what I missed in Mastricht’s writings. In TPT, I, 183-184, he refers to the Testimony of the Holy Spirit as the means to embrace Scripture as the Word of God, with reference to Rom. 8:16. He further defines this as an “internal illuminative persuasion,” with reference to 1 Cor. 2:12. This makes us “discern the marks of divinity divinely impressed upon Scripture.” The problem is that neither passage conveys this. It is preferable, therefore, as (only?) one Systematic Theology posits this, that the proper recognition and the heartfelt embrace of Scripture as God’s Inerrant Word comes with and goes hand in hand with the regeneration by the Spirit. Only a heart transplant can experience a regenerate *heartfelt* embrace. Once folks are born again, they will never deny “the umbilical cord” of the Word (1 Pet. 2:23-25) that brought this about. If Mastricht had recognized this, he would have undoubtedly put a much greater emphasis on the need to honor the first part of Christ Grand Command as God’s way to a heart transplant in regeneration, and thereby the embrace of Scripture as his Inerrant Word. Incidentally, I am deeply indebted to the writings of our Puritan ancestors and cannot recommend them highly enough. But it slowly but surely dawned upon me that they published hundreds of thousands of invaluable, if not inestimable pages on “internal (‘ecclesiastical,’ Church) medicine,” that is, on “teaching them to observe whatever God commands.” But I could not find much more than a thousand (?) pages (by Alleyne, *Alarm to the Unconverted*; Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*; and Flavel, *Christ Knocking at the Door of Sinners’ Hearts*) which they dedicated to “external (‘mondial,’ world) medicine,” that is, about “making disciples.” (Even at that, these pages in addressing the readers with the Gospel were more directly evangelistic “preaching” than that they emphasized the need for and sought to equip in evangelism.) It would be worthwhile to explore whether the decline of Puritanism has anything to do with this. This is not to sidestep the assessment of Errol Hulse, *Introduction to the Puritans* (Pensacola, FL: The Chapel Library, 2020), 47-48. He ascribes the decline of Puritanism to three factors. (1) The Persecution of the (Puritan) Dissenters after their dismissal from the Established Church, (2) The Loss of Unity among the Puritan Brotherhood, and (3) The Lack of Successors of the same caliber as the original Leaders upon their demise, even if their influence continued through their writings. Of course, it is rather clear that the failure of these writings to put the “making of disciples” in both theoretical and practical concrete could not but have contributed to this decline, if they did not result in it. The virtual wholesale failure and at times refusal, especially in the Reformed faith, to honor God’s provision of the office of evangelist to spearhead this “making of disciples” undoubtedly has contributed to this as well. The permanence of this office can (must!) be ascertained by three inviolable biblical pillars, Eph. 4:11, Acts 21:8 (8:5ff, 26ff), and 2 Tim. 4:5. In Eph. 4:11 the office of evangelist is established. There is no evidence whatsoever that this is temporary or has been abrogated. The burden of proof lies squarely on the shoulders of the detractors of this office. Acts 21:8 establishes that there are practicing evangelists. In 2 Tim. 4:5 Paul instructs Timothy, a pastor-teacher, to do the “work of an evangelist.” Paul would never have done the latter if there had been no flourishing office. It is a sad day when the Church acknowledges the need for pastor-teachers to spearhead its teaching ministry and deacons to head up its serving ministry, but overlooks, ignores or rejects the need for evangelists to forefront its evangelistic ministry. Historically “communions” that have rejected or paid lip service to the office of evangelist in principle or in practice have paid a heavy qualitative and quantitative price!

¹⁹ The use of “Cascade” and “Dehydrate” is intended as a meaningful play of words. I equate baptism with “pouring” for the following reason. John the Baptizer informs his audience that the Christ will “baptize” with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11). When he did so at Pentecost, Luke tells us that he “poured” the Spirit on his Church (Acts 2:33). This was clearly a momentous, powerful, and far-reaching event. The term “cascade” is used to convey that the sacrament of Baptism is equally momentous, powerful, and far-reaching. It spells radical and total identification with the Triune God with all that this entails in terms of making disciples out of “wretched sinners” through the threefold definitive

be “boomed” into the Church. This, as an ever-worthy and ever-needy companion of “An Alarm to the Unconverted” to be “boomed” into the world. To identify the Church as a “boom box” is no exaggeration. It is the Biblical “Normal!”

To conclude this Preface, the present volume is not an easy read for at least three reasons.

First, since Biblical truth is not understood unless it lodges in the regenerate heart of men as their life-and-mission control center (Deut. 29:4; Is. 9:10; Acts 28:26-27; Rom. 10:9), no treatment of any topic of Scripture is “an easy read.”²⁰ It takes the grace of God (Acts 16:14; 2 Cor. 4:6), the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17-18) and intercessory prayer (Col. 1:9) for the heart to grasp it. But when it does, it always turns into obedient action. The fear of God which is the evidence of a regenerate heart (Deut. 5:29a) will see to this (Deut. 5:29b; Job 28:28).

Second, both the staggering amount and the complicated content of the literature on the topic of Divine Immutability and on the closely related, if not underlying concept of Divine Simplicity show the intricacy of the issues that are and need to be covered. So, any contribution that wishes to shed (additional?) light on what is at stake must per force reach wide, far, and deep, if not wider, farther, and deeper than has been the case thus far. So, right from the start it wishes to be sensitive as well unapologetic in alerting the reader that it requires a good deal of time, concentration, and energy to analyze and assess its content.

Third, the conclusions reached in this volume may not sit too well at first sight with certain proponents of Divine Immutability and its underlying Divine Simplicity, as well as with those who advocate Divine Mutability, whether they do so in whole or on part, or who may question Divine Simplicity for whatever reason. But it is written and meant to be read by hopefully “Eager Bereans” (Acts 17:11)!

So, Reader, please, consult Scripture for your “final verdict.” Frankly, I have come (had to come) to the conclusion that the doctrines of Divine Immutability and Divine Simplicity, when *biblically* defined, is like steel in the concrete of Christ’s Triple Command. It does, and cannot but reinforce it, to make it indestructible, and to prompt its zealous pursuit as an undying reality. My critique of what I regard to be a questionable presentation and defense of either doctrine is not to impugn the basic stance of their proponents. Far from it! In terms of these doctrines we stand shoulder to shoulder. Neither is it to undermine them. In fact, quite the opposite. It is to argue that any, and all questionable (sub-biblical) presentations and (anti-biblical) defenses are counterproductive and either miss their desired target or are an unwitting stumbling block to arrive there. In a word, this volume aims to safeguard them, to have them come into their biblical own, and so to appreciate them as the precious rocket fuel that helps put the obedience of Christ’s Triple Command in orbit!

At any rate, if you come to agree that the conclusions in this volume are spot on, embrace them, pursue them, and spread them. If you find them lacking in the light of Scripture, do not hesitate to contact the author who would be grateful to stand corrected in any and all

Commented [HK1]:

New Covenant Gospel of regeneration, justification, and sanctification, and teaching “wretched saints” to obey whatever God commands through the threefold progressive New Covenant Gospel of daily repentance and faith, daily forgiveness, and daily renewal. The New Covenant Gospel in both its dimensions is Trinitarian to the core, since it is promised and held out in prospect by the Father, personified and produced by God the Son, and personalized and transported by the Holy Spirit. The opposite, “dehydrate,” failure or refusal to embrace this identification, spells destruction and death. I have personally seen physically dehydrated folks in a “Third World country,” who had to be hospitalized and treated on the spot to escape their demise, often in the nick of time. “Physical Dehydration” imperils. But “Spiritual Dehydration” even more so!

²⁰ Below shortened as “life-mission control center.”

joint-efforts to advance the Kingdom of God through the Church of God, by means of the Word of God, in the Spirit of God, under the Christ of God, by the grace of God, and to the glory of God.

To make this volume as readable and understandable as possible, here is the Layout of its content. Following this Preface, it is covered in Twelve Sections with a summarizing Postscript at the end. The Spotlights that from time to time intersperse these Sections are printed in a smaller font. These could, for the time being, be skipped until “a more convenient time.” But they serve an important purpose. As mentioned, they enlarge on and go into greater depth of relevant issues that either face everybody or are necessary to undergird the objective of this volume!

Section I, The Introduction, focuses on the “absolute” necessity to honor the complementarity of truth as a guide and guard not to be tempted, let alone to be victimized in any theological undertaking by any effort mentally to penetrate the impenetrable “How” of God’s “secrets” or any attempt emotionally to pursue the forbidden “Why” of his “actions.”²¹

Section II and III take a closer look at the possible underlying theological and philosophical commitments that give rise to either the Defense or the Opposition to the Doctrine of Divine Immutability and identify pitfalls to avoid.

Sections IV, V, and VI focus specifically on the Classic Reformed as well as the Thomist defense of Divine Immutability and cover its content.

Sections VII and VIII present a preliminary analysis and a provisional assessment of both.

Section IX deals with several recent proponents of Divine Mutability whether they do so exclusively or partly.

Section X presents an analytic comparison of those who hold to Divine Immutability and those who dismiss it totally or partially.

Section XI conveys my provisional findings that due to their finite “humanity,” which is often flawed, always are and must be open to scrutiny in the light of Scripture.

This is followed by the Sections XII and XIII, which contain a twofold Pastoral Appeal. Here I first pose some questions to ponder by both Immutabilists and Mutabilists and then

²¹ Spotlight I, which covers two samples, one focusing on the impenetrable “How” and seeking to make it intelligible, and one preoccupied with the forbidden “Why,” and seeking to make sense of it, is inserted at the conclusion of this Preface and is meant to “light up” the all too often prevailing “dark” backdrop that helped prompt the writing of this volume. In these two samples I (we) hear the cry for a “solution” of the “How” of reality and the “Why” of human existence. This must prompt everybody at least to make an effort to provide the utterly necessary biblical “remedy,” both in a soaring delight in our God in and by virtue of his Self-disclosure, ontological and epistemological *limits* and all, and in a sole and exclusive focus upon its inevitably corresponding objective of a God-delighting obedience of faith. It should be clear that those who seek to determine or explain the impenetrable “How” fall victim to a *theo-ontology*, as they explore the *essence* of God’s being beyond what Scripture reveals. Those who seek to determine or find out the forbidden “Why” fall victim to a *theo-ontology*, as they interrogate the *logic* of God’s ethics beyond what Scripture discloses. All of us, potential “How Sayers” and “Why Askers” should recognize, in the words of an astute commentator, that “the deepest meaning of both human life in the nearness of God and of human dignity in his Covenant is this: that we are ecstatic that our Lord does *all* his (sovereign) good pleasure. This is our deepest Christian joy and our highest human pride: that our Lord does all his good pleasure. As soon as we forget this *even* a little we sink into a state that is below the truly human.”²¹ This delight will be our strength, will engender cognitive, volitional and emotional rest in the face of the gladly embraced complementarity of truth, will stop the near-incessant illegitimate “How’s” that characterizes all apostate philosophy, and the all too frequent “Why’s,” also on the part of professing Christians, and so remove the self-inflicted barriers, and pave the way, to pursue God’s ethics as one’s all-overriding concern.

formulate my “conclusions or “verdict.” Both sections may remove some unease, if not remedy some possible pain this volume may initially leave in its wake, and hopefully pave the way to produce a brotherly and heartfelt United Front to advance Kingdom of God shoulder to shoulder with the Word of God in the way of God by the grace of God to the glory of God. A mere mental agreement is never sufficient and may never be the “Grand Objective!”

A Postscript summarizes the threefold heartbeat of this volume, which doubles as antidote against defined aberrations, and paves the way to “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). It invites possible Critics to start their Response at these points for our mutual edification.

A contemporary author who focuses on the same issues that occupies us in this volume issues at times a strong critique of the views of some of his fellow authors. But in the Preface of his publication he states that this critique does not intend “to question the love for the Lord exhibited by them” nor “to impugn their persons.” In his introductory chapter he adds that he is simply driven by the necessity to honor the Word of God and in doing so the God of that Word. At the same time, he offers his contribution as “a beginning of a much-needed work.”²²

I simply wish to echo this and would like to stand shoulder to shoulder with this brother, *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*! Candidly, the input on the topic at hand over the centuries is so gigantic that it is impossible to do justice to all of it. At the same time, however momentous some of this may be, in the winged words of A. W. Pink, “the best of man is man at best.” So, we must continue to look in God’s Word for the much-needed light to interact with both the past and the present, to align ourselves with it or to confront it, fully expecting (and hoping) to be judged in the same way by the future so that sooner later, by Divine grace and human sharpening iron with iron, those who are men-at-best will arrive at the increasingly better-of-men, until at the end we will receive God’s best. On this earth theology is and remains a *theologia viatorum*, in the full recognition that all theologies will have elements that turn into fuel for the “good riddance” fire in the Judgment (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

In short, this calls for a firm (uncompromising?) tone (*fortiter in re*) when it pertains to views that could threaten the cause of the Kingdom of God as well as an irenic spirit (*suaviter in modo*) toward brothers in order not to shatter a United Front necessary to advance this Kingdom as maximally as possible (John 13:35). Augustine may well have summed it up best, “Let everyone who reads these pages proceed further with me, where he is equally certain as I aim. Let him make inquiries with me where he is equally hesitant as I am. Wherever he recognizes the error as his, let him return to me. Wherever it is mine, let him call me back. Thus, let us enter on the path of charity in search of him of whom it is said, ‘Seek his face for evermore.’”²³

²² James E. Dolezal, *All that is in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), xvi, 8.

²³ Augustine, *The Trinity* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press), 8, as quoted in Long, PSTG, xiv.

Spotlight I

Grappling with the “How of the Universe” (Process Philosophy) and with the “Why of History” (Nicholas Wolterstorff).

In anticipation of what follows below, it appears that the “How” pitfall is in clear evidence in Process Theology and the “Why” issue is addressed by Nicholas Wolterstorff. Process theology is influenced by Hegel’s dialectical philosophy and developed from Alfred Whitehead’s process philosophy, most notably by Charles Hartshorne. God both affects and is affected by temporal processes, contrary to the forms of theism that hold God to be in all respects non-temporal (eternal), unchanging (immutable), and unaffected by the world (impassible). Process theology contradicts the classical view by insisting that God is in some respects, temporal, mutable, and passible. Whitehead’s classical statement is a set of antithetical statements that attempt to avoid self-contradiction by shifting them from a set of oppositions into a contrast: It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent. It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many. It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently. It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God (So, paraphrased, in *Wikipedia* see also Long, PSTG, 175-195, 334-338, for an extensive treatment of Process Theism as a failing proposition). In all this not a trace of acknowledging even the possible presence of incomprehensible Divine “secrets!”

Turning now to Wolterstorff, he raises the “Why” issue in his dealing with the sudden loss and untimely death of his son. See IG, 246-247, 252-254. “The divine experiment has not worked out. The experiment of creating ... creatures ... with the intent that each, and everyone should flourish until full of years. Suffering and life-duration have gone agonizingly awry with reference to that (Divine) intent. Why have they gone awry? Why was the life of this young person snuffed out when young? Why did that person suffer years of intractable suffering that not only went beyond all proper functioning but from which nothing redemptive could any longer be extracted? Why all this brevity of life and all this suffering? But no answer is forthcoming. Listen as we may, we hear no further speech. Only silence. Non-answering silence.” After rejecting the “soul-making theodicy that speaks only of the survivors and not of the victims” as well as the “free will defense that permits (the woe) of *one* person for the sake of the unencumbered free agency (and possible weal) of *another*,” he concludes as follows, “Suffering and life-duration have gone awry with reference to God’s creating and maintaining intent. To acknowledge that is to have the question well up irresistibly: Why? Why this untimely death? Why that unredemptive suffering? Why any untimely death and why any untimely suffering? We cannot help but ask. Yet we get no answer. None that I can discern. We confront non-answering silence. We confront the biblical silence of the biblical God. We shall have to live in that silence.” But this is not his last word. “We shall endure in holding on to God and shall engage in practices of devotion whereby such holding on is accomplished, expressed and nurtured.” How shall we endure? Well, “in our protest against early death and untimely suffering, in our existential No to both.” “We shall join the divine battle against all that goes awry with reference to God’s intent. We shall join God in doing battle against all that causes early death and all that leads to unredemptive suffering, disease, injustice, warfare, torture enmity ... He is not a God who weakly struggles in a failing cause but a God whose cause will triumph. It is that cause that we shall join as God’s co-workers.” However, precisely at this point “biblical faith is severely tried. Is it *really* true that God will win? Can we trust the struggle’s outcome when we do not know the struggle’s cause? Or wouldn’t it help to know the cause?” Wolterstorff returns to this in a recent volume, *In this World of Wonders: Memoir in a Life of Learning* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019), 210. He does not understand why things have gone awry in God’s creation, “nor do I understand why God puts up with it for so long. Rather than Eric’s death invoking in me an interest in theology, it had the effect in making God more mysterious. I live with the mystery.”

Of course, far be it from anyone to react insensitively to a painful “response” to a ravaging existential situation. But in sympathetic dismay we may (must?) ask several questions. When facing any, and all griefs, from minor to devastating ones, which is the lot of all mankind, why do (should) all of us not turn to “theology?” That is, to God’s Eternal Word in which light we see light to the extent that this is revealed (Ps. 36:9b)? In the

middle of God's clear, specific, and sovereign silence, why is there not (should there not be) customarily a Job-like and child-like acknowledgement that this is God's absolute prerogative? Further, why not the indispensable diagnosis of suffering and death as the consequence of original sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12)? Why not the exclusive focus upon the indispensable conquest of sin, rather the seemingly unrelenting combat against its consequences of sin? Why not the proclamation of the cross and resurrection of the Christ as the only possible antidote for sin and of God's shalom only to be enjoyed in its effective wake? Why not the warning that those whose minds are solely set upon earthly things end up facing the destruction of eternal suffering and death as enemies of the cross and the resurrection (Phil. 3:18-19). Why not the summons to obey the Grand Triple Command of our Commander-in-Chief as matter of eternal life and eternal death to combat the root of sin in the way of repentance and faith and thereby to abate, if not to eliminate the misery of sin? Why not the emphatic declaration of both God's cause to assemble an innumerable populated Church (Rev. 7:9) through the cross (Rev. 5:9-10) and God's triumph in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22), as disclosed in Scripture and especially the Book of Revelation, all to the glory of the Triune God? Why not immediately count it joy when trials wash over us as God's prescribed to teach us endurance on the road to perfection (Jam. 1:2). When the New Heaven and the New Earth are a reality, all suffering and death are gone forever and replaced by the blessedness of life and worship (Rev. 7:13-17). The tragic alternative? Suffering and death will reach their tragic zenith (Rev. 14:9-10; 20:15). So, why the call to put all eggs in the basket of the world of admitted suffering and death at the expense of what should be the summons to the all-overriding Gospel and Word combat that seeks to return folks to God and so defeat the suffering and death to come?

To top it off, why not trumpet the message that creation, fall, redemption, consummation, and literally all that this entails serves to put God's Trinitarian Being and the sum-total of his perfections on glorious display in the Judgment? All this comes into play and falls into place, when in the middle of searing pain due to circumstances which give the impression that God has forgotten to be gracious and in anger withholds his mercy the spirit of Psalm 77 prevails. The author fastens his heart and mind on the past awesome-action-*magnalia Dei* in a child-like fashion, and a sense of *shalom*, of well-being invades and overtakes him. The author of Psalm 89 in the middle of a similar seemingly hopeless scenario of divine wrathful judgment and brisling enemy hostility appeals and so hangs on to the past equally awesome promise-*magnalia Dei* in the same child-like way, and in the end wishes God eternal *shalom* and solidifies this with a two-fold Amen! (Some interpreters believe that one of the two *shalom*-Amen's is also meant to give the author of Psalm 88 a sense of God-centered closure, that is, his brother who does not seem to see any light at the end of his tunnel). At any rate, the two samples in this Spotlight accentuate the much-needed content and purpose of all this.

To proceed from good to better to best, all theological undertakings should start with Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*) and with all of Scripture (*Tota Scriptura*), should additionally stay away from all illegitimate "How's" and forbidden "Why's," and, to top it off once more, should purposefully focus on the enhancement of heartfelt and unwavering obedience to the Triple Command, issued by our Commander-in-Chief to be co-workers of the Father (1 Cor. 3:9), ambassadors of the Son (2 Cor. 5:20) and ministers of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6) so as to serve God's cause and to arrive at God's triumph!

None of this can be detected in the "how" of process theology. Frankly, not much of it in any "why" theology either. But it should be the balm that heals the heart of any grieving father, or mother, or friend, or any fellow believer. Regrettably, the bottom line must be that those who would feel themselves "at home" in either scenario could (would?) opt for an existence that is more akin to a horizontal Humanist Manifesto (*sub specie temporis*) than for the vertical Biblical one (*sub specie aeternitatis*). All this underlies the urgency to explore, explain and surrender to the biblical light on both the "How" and the "Why." Eternity may be at stake. In this context, in contrast to too much man-centeredness, let us listen to the telling and touching testimony "by an adherent to the *devotio moderna*, a religious movement important in the Netherlands in the 15th century." He experienced a situation that virtually destroyed a thriving school which as a result "dispersed swarms of students, not, it is to be feared, without some danger to their souls," but ended up sharing his heart as follows, "Nonetheless, to (him) be the honor, and the glory, now and through the ages, to him whose judgments, though hidden, yet never unjust" (Quoted in Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," in Pasnau, CHMP, 783-784).

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I. Introduction

One of the greatest sins in the Church, and especially in the Academy, is the one against the complementarity of truth. It is serious not in the last place because of its often-unrecognized implications and its often-unintended consequences. The most incisive complementarity of truth is marked by the mystery of a polarity, such as the simultaneous Oneness and Threeness in the Godhead, or the concurrence of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, that is not open to a probing exploration, let alone to a successful explanation by the human mind.²⁴ Of course, *ultimately and from God's perspective* the two poles are without even a trace of self-contradiction. But *from the perspective of the finite and creaturely human mind* they do not just seem or appear to be contrastive, if not contradictory, they *are* contrastive, if not contradictory, even if they incomprehensibly live and enjoy a clearly harmonious and peaceful co-existence. Because the complementarity of truth comes with incomprehensibility, it puts a leash on the human mind. To overlook or to ignore this “leash” is dangerous business and comes with a price. In fact, it spells human *hubris* in that it moves beyond its pay scale and jurisdiction while it seeks to enter the “secrets” of God by making the unintelligible intelligible in one way or another. The present volume intends to fight this *hubris* tooth and nail and spells out its inevitable pitfalls that are always deleterious and at times calamitous.

Spotlight II

The Nature of the Complementarity of Truth

The fact that *from the perspective of the finite and creaturely human mind* the two poles of the complementarity of truth does not just seem or appear to be contrastive, if not contradictory, but *are* contrastive, if not contradictory, even if they incomprehensibly live a clearly harmonious and peaceful co-existence, is (regrettably) challenged at least in part by Frame, ST, 332, in his otherwise *admirable* and *prodigious* contribution to the enterprise of Systematic Theology. Since the nature of the complementarity of truth is

²⁴ There is also a type of complementarity that is explainable, such as the polarity of both Divine love/goodness and Divine holiness/judgment. Compare Lam. 3:21-25 (for the love/goodness sequence) and Lam. 5:19-22 (for the holiness/judgment sequence). A Systematic Theology can intelligibly account for both. Of course, Systematic Theology cannot explain why in some instances (individuals) love/goodness prevails over holiness/judgment and in other instances (individuals) holiness/judgment over love/goodness. This is one of God's “secrets” (Rom. 9:14-24, spec. 18, 20; see also Lk. 22:3, 21-22 in comparison to 22:31-32). But both are simultaneously and understandably found in God. At any rate, what is in view in the present essay, once again, is the kind of complementarity that does and should baffle the mind, such as the enigma of the nature of light, which is inexplicably identified as simultaneously a particle and a wave, as well as the simultaneous reality of the “orderly” General Theory of Relativity in the macro-cosm and the “disorderly” quantum physics in the micro-cosm. All past efforts to synthesize them in a “Grand Theory of Everything” ended up in failure, and all future efforts will end up in failure as well as I argue further below, with reason for this and all.

pivotal in the present volume, this challenge requires a “response.” Pertaining to doctrines, such as “divine sovereignty/freedom, the problem of evil, and the Trinity,” Frame pens, “Cornelius Van Til believed that these doctrines involve ‘apparent contradictions’ that can never be reconciled by the finite human mind. I do not think Scripture tells us what apparent contradictions are reconcilable by creatures and what are not. On these three doctrinal issues mentioned above, I have tried in this book to state them non-paradoxically in ways that remove the appearance of contradiction while preserving, of course, the mystery of God’s relation to the world. I may have succeeded or failed ... But I see no reason why we should stop trying ... Some apparent contradictions can ... be removed by careful study of God’s word ... Others await future increases in our Bible knowledge ... or even perhaps await future developments in the science of logic itself. Others, perhaps, await out vastly increased knowledge of God (1 Cor. 13:2-8; 1 John 3:2) when we meet him in glory. And still others may be such that creaturely minds can never reconcile them ... (If so) we should simply try to hold both sides of the paradox, at best we can and walk by faith. If divine sovereignty and human responsibility seem contradictory to us, we may and should, nevertheless, both continue to regard God as sovereign and accept responsibility for our thoughts and actions. Our faith does not depend on or being able to reconcile all apparent contradictions. Rather it rests on the solid revelation of God’s revelation of himself, in all creation, in Scripture, and in Christ. So, we walk by faith rather than by sight.”

In short response to all this, as I stated in Footnote 24, there are, indeed, “seeming” contradictions that can be explained. Further, there may well be “seeming” contradictions that will be explained in heaven. But there are also “apparent” contradictions, such as the One and the Three in the Trinity. It is preposterous even to try to explain how one Divine Essence comports with three Persons, without being a Tri-theism, or how one Person is eternally generated by another Person and one Person is eternally spirated by two Persons. Even the difference between “generation” and “spiration” is a mystery. The simultaneity of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility poses a similar problem. So, in all this Van Til is right on the money. These “problems” cannot be solved by the finite human mind. Period! So, do not even give it “a try!” The “winged word” may well apply here. “Reject the fundamental reality of the mysterious complementarity of truth, and you may lose your ‘soul.’ Seek to comprehend it, and you may lose your ‘wits.’”

At the same time, the word “Paradox” is *not* a “winner.” There is *no* place for or trace of “ultimate” contradiction in Scripture. Therefore, there should none of that in our theology. This means that “paradox” cannot have the final word. If this is what Frame is after, I cannot but agree. But so-called “paradoxes” only exist *for* and can never be solved *by the human mind*. Complementary truths that are contrastive or contradictory to the finite human mind *only can and do find a cognitive, volitional, and emotional resting place in the regenerate heart*. That is where all so-called “paradoxes” vanish altogether. So, we do not *merely* walk by faith rather than sight, namely, simply facing a problem that we cannot solve and possibly throwing up our hands in the process. To degrade a transcendent Divine mystery into a “problem” already is to exhibit a presumptuous and restless mind rather than a restful and worshipful heart.²⁵ That “the heart of the problem is the problem of the unregenerate heart” must be immediately crystal clear. Where else but in the regenerate heart does “The Trinity” lodge restfully and worshipfully? Where else can the fact that *God* hardens Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 7:3, 13, 22) but holds *Pharaoh* responsible when he hardens his heart (Ex. 8:15), find a worshipful resting place? Where else, to be very practical, do and can we experience contentment and express pride in “weakness,” the weakness of “insults, distress, persecution, difficulties,” “for Christ’s sake,” declaring if not glorying, of all things that our weakness is our strength (2 Cor. 12:10)? The Festus’es of this world will undoubtedly tell us that “we are insane, have gone mad” (Acts 26:24), insisting of all things that “impossibility” is “reality” (Acts 26:23)! In each of these three instances, which can be multiplied many times, the incomprehensible nature of the complementarity of truth clearly takes center stage! However, to bring this “heart issue” in the strongest possible perspective, why would men like Packer and Piper argue that God cannot and may not be charged with “extreme egotism” when all that he says and does is designed to serve his own glory? See for this Isaiah 42:8; Ezekiel 36:22; Ephesians 1:12, 14, to mention only a few passages. Their argument is not just “rational.” “What else can one expect from a boundless ocean of towering all-transcending and all-encompassing glory? There simply is no other alternative.” Their argument has a deeper root. It is their regenerated heart’s identification with the God of Glory that puts them in rejoicing and worshipful lockstep with the Glory of God as the Ultimate Objective of Everything! Frankly, they do not just want us to agree with them. They want us to *join* them in the rapturous kind of worshipful joy that according to the Psalter is in telling evidence in the OT already (Ps. 95:1ff; 96:1ff; 97:1ff; 98:1ff; 99:1ff) and according to Peter reaches its

²⁵ See for this also, Ury, TP, 27.

zenith in the NT (1 Pet. 1:8)! Frankly, it is this “spirit of authenticity” that never fails to “spell-bind” their readers!

All in all, by Frame’s first recommendation “to keep on trying” he fails once and for all to cut off all basically arrogant “theo-ontology” that seeks to explain the unexplainable at its very roots. This is serious in the light (read: darkness) of the Centuries-long theo-ontological track record, such as on display in the Sabellian, Arian, Pelagian, and Arminian controversies.

By his second recommendation “to walk by faith” he falls short of calling attention to the biblical imperative to lodge complementary truths in the heart as the only place where one is in total peace and where the mind will cease to be “antsy” and gladly give up all possible dismay or protest. In fact, the “recommendation just to walk by faith” never worked in the middle of controversies. It invariably was viewed as “a sacrifice of the intellect.” In all candor, it is the ultimacy of the intellect (on the part of unbelievers) or the primacy of the intellect (on the part of believers) that caused the problems in the above-mentioned controversies in the first place. Therefore, these must be challenged (and should have been challenged by Frame) with a call to repentance as the evidence of a *heart transplant* (in unbelievers; Ezek. 36:26; John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3) or a *heart’s purification* (in believers; Jam. 4:8c).

Finally, with his two recommendations Frame, candidly, missed two precious opportunities. The first one is to address unbelievers evangelistically. “Call on the Lord for a *heart transplant* in regeneration, lodge your “paradoxes” there. That’s where they disappear, and you will have cognitive, volitional, and emotive rest.” The second is to address believers pastorally. “Walk in the footsteps of and imitate Job in 42:6 where he *purified his heart* in repentance and (finally?) evidenced the truths of Job 27 and 28.” Here Job states, for all practical purposes, I am facing two “secrets,” the secret of my life of “doom” (Job 27) and the secret of life “in general” (Job 28). But (what I now fully understand) God has reserved *this* twofold “wisdom” for *himself*. However, praise him, he told me *my* “wisdom.” It is “to fear God!” When this is understood, all of us will spend all our time and energy to refrain from evil (and to pursue godliness) (Job 28:28)!” Here is the blueprint of Deut. 29:29 in living colors. Every author or speaker on the topics that occupy us in this volume should have one unceasing refrain, “Don’t pry, don’t pry, don’t pry into God’s forbidden (Job 27) and incomprehensible (Job 28) *secrets*. Fear God and pursue his *ethics*. The more you focus on the former, the more you will omit the latter. In that case (of need), radically repent and totally refocus.” At any rate, when the most righteous man of his time -- of all times? -- (Job 1:8) stands in need of repentance (Job 42:6), all of us would well be wise “to fasten our seatbelts.” But more about all this below.

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To make sure that the *nature* of complementarity of truth is not misunderstood, let us look once more at the phenomenon mentioned earlier. Physicists recognize the conundrum that the nature of “light” is simultaneously a “wave” and a “particle.” The harmonious and peaceful co-existence of these two contradictories at face value is both incontestable and incomprehensible. It simply defies explanation and therefore is (to be) left alone. Physicists who recognize this simply and cheerfully accept this and do their work within the given, but unexplainable parameters. Much more about this below.

But for now, this does and should help to shed light on the “sin” against the complementarity of truth. It emerges any time that the human mind arrogantly exceeds the limits of its finitude and stubbornly steps outside its creaturely jurisdiction, whether consciously and intentionally or not, in an attempt to synthesize the two poles, to explain their polarity or to give it some kind of intelligible footing. It is crystal clear that scholasticism is driven by the (Anselmian) maxim *Fides Quaerit Intellectum*.²⁶ This basically means that

²⁶ See M. W. F. Stone and Robert Wisnovski, “Philosophy and Theology,” in CHMP, II, 695. Ury, TP, 64, correctly suggests that the *Fides Quaerit Intellectum* mantra, which forms “the basis for most sectors of Christian philosophizing and theologizing,” better be “humble in its approach to the borderlands of the ‘mysteries’ of the Godhead.”

faith is in search of intelligibility to solidify itself.²⁷ The first question is how this “stacks up” with Paul’s prayer for “spiritual understanding” as a gift of God! This clearly is a matter of the thinking heart rather than the thinking mind.²⁸ So, is there (every?) reason to believe that in and through this maxim that literally took the theological world by storm the rational took centerstage, eclipsed the spiritual, and in the process destroyed the hunger for it, until the Reformation sought to “righten the ship?” A second question is whether, where, or when the rational search simply went “a speculative bridge too far,” when it eagerly utilized philosophical considerations as a “handmaiden” to arrive at its target.²⁹ This prompts a third question. Are these “considerations” truly the “assisting servant” that they are supposed to be, or do they resemble a dominant Trojan Horse that is warmly welcomed but ends up being self-destructive? These three questions do and must receive our much-needed attention.

In short, the sin against the complementarity of truth materializes when it seeks “to penetrate the secret things of God” (Deut. 29:29a). That is, to determine the hidden and incomprehensible *essence* of the being (or actions) of God. Rather than reverently “to worship him” (Job 1:21) and humbly “to act upon what he reveals in his law” (Deut. 29:29b). This is, to advance the glory of God by pursuing the spelled-out *ethics* explicitly divulged by God. So, to seek to unravel God’s mysteries, his “secret things,” is a matter of human *hubris* as well as human *defiance* and ends up as a terrible waste of precious time and energy that should have been spent in spreading his fame (worship) and surrendering to his commands (obedience). That is, especially to the threefold marching order issued by our Commander-in-Chief in Matthew 28:19-20 that must be and remain the focus and driving force of his Church following the reception of the inexhaustible supply of Holy Spirit Power with which he graced it (Acts 1:18; 2:1ff). This does and must get our extensive and detailed attention below as well!

The Psalmist understands all this when he renounces human arrogance and refuses to involve himself in great matters, such as, God’s essential “secrets,” that are too difficult for him to grasp. Instead he quiets his heart and is totally content like a weaned child with whatever God in word (Scripture) and in deed (Providence) has in store for him in the context of his people (Ps. 131:1-3). In a word, he does not only reject the *ultimacy* of the human intellect, which is typical of the conscious, intentional *substantive* apostasy of unbelievers who invariably seek to figure things out with their mind and puzzle things out in their lives apart from God and often in defiance against him. But he also distances himself from the *primacy* of the intellect, which regrettably is all too often characteristic of the

²⁷ See for this Stephen M. Brown and Juan Carlos Flores, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Philosophy and Theology* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 274-275, “Philosophy (according to Aquinas) is using reason to know the way things are.” In his *Summa Theologiae* “he makes the human effort to try to see things theologically, that is according to the divine order of reality.” See also Gilles Emery, “The Trinity,” in OHA, 419, who argues that Aquinas’ philosophical “argument (regarding the Trinity) consists of ‘persuasions’ that do not demonstrate the Trinity but seek to render the Trinitarian faith *more articulate* in the minds of believers and that show that what is proposed to faith is not impossible so that ‘the mind is lifted up to get some glimpse of the truth that suffices for excluding errors.’” The target is clearly for the truth to become more “palatable” to the human *mind* rather than to be “lodged” in the *regenerate heart*.

²⁸ See for this the monograph of John Owen, *Spiritual Understanding*, to be found in his Works, Vol. IV, 117-234. No one should be allowed to proclaim, reach, etc., the Word without having absorbed its content!

²⁹ The often repeated and now famous simile that “philosophy should be related to Scripture ‘like a handmaiden to her mistress’ originates in Petrus Damian (1007-1072). See for this Peter King, “Philosophy in the Latin Christian West: 750-1050,” in Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone, eds., *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 35.

hopefully unintentional, unconscious *methodological* apostasy of too many believers who fall in the same twofold mind and life trap. The Psalmist “gets it,” as he obediently bows before the reality that human knowledge, even when true, is never total or exhaustive and human conduct, even when proper, is never comprehensive or cut and dried. In this, and in the unavoidable outcome of joyful worship and heartfelt holiness, our Psalmist is not alone. He shares it with other Psalmists (Ps. 71:15; 72:18; 92:5).

Furthermore, when Job in his clearly unconscious and unintentional stubborn posture insists that God owes him “an explanation” to satisfy his mind and to explain his life, he is mercifully slapped on his wrist (Job 38:1-40:2, esp. 40:2; 40:6-41:34) and eventually repents in dust and ashes (Job 42:1-6). He did deeply so, after having concluded that until that time he, who was the most righteous man on earth, second to none (Job 1:8), had (quite) apparently only a truncated “hear-say” knowledge of God (Job 42:5). But now he sees God for who he is, apparently “for the first time,” a God who has a secret as well as unknown counsel, which doubles as a forbidden territory. While this clearly accounted for the tapestry of his life, he recognizes it as “too wonderful” for him in exceeding his finitude and transcending his jurisdiction (Job 42:3). What he already had confessed (in theory?), the reality of God’s “unsearchable secrets and unfathomable activity” and his “innumerable wonders and unassailable actions” (Job 5:9; 9:10, 32), he now “sees” (experientially!) with 20-20 vision and embraces it to the full. This “vision,” coupled with his necessary and inevitable repentance, gave him tranquility of mind and serenity of life. Therewith Job wholeheartedly joined the Psalmist who refused to penetrate the impenetrable and was totally satisfied to pay homage to God and to act upon what was revealed. No wonder that he obediently prayed for his (awful) friends when God ordered him to do so (Job 42:8b). As someone stated with perceptive humility and humble perception, that even if “the formula” (or “scheme”) were correct that behind our temporal, finite and 7created “*ec*-typal” (derived) knowledge of reality “hovers” God’s eternal, infinite and uncreated “*arche*-typal” (original) knowledge, the latter is completely out of bounds to the creature. So, seeking to plumb its content and essence, must be resisted like the plague. It is essentially to move beyond Scripture and to view reality from a supposedly higher vantage point, whether philosophical, logical, or otherwise. Such move, whether misguidedly fortuitous or rebelliously intentional, is and remains the potential or definitive final nail in the coffin of one’s thinking.

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Spotlight III

The Archetype-Ectype Distinction

The (contrastive!) archetype-ectype distinction is controversial. Terminologically, it did not emerge until the 15th Century. But the substance was already present in Plato’s Form-Matter distinction in which the original Forms had their mirror reflection in Matter. Orthodox Reformed scholasticism bought into this. According to Muller, PRRD, I, 225-238, 263, 267-268, there was general agreement (1) that “true human theology is an ectype or reflection resting on but not commensurate with the divine self-knowledge,” and (2) that the contrastive nature of this distinction excludes any kind of univocity and spawned the concept of analogy. “Primarily and principally, *theologia* is *theologia archetypa* and only secondarily and by similitude is it *theologia ectypa*.” Here the plot thickens. A “paradox” emerges. On the one hand, “*theologia archetypa* (the infinite self-knowledge of God) is incapable of communication to creatures (incommunicable).” On the other hand, “it is transmitted to

the created order (communicative).” However, the ectypal results are only “faint images or vestiges.” Since there is no analogical path from the divine imprint to the full knowledge of God,” we can (only) “adore it.” After all, there is “no possibility to inquire into it.” It is and remains outside of our jurisdiction! Despite this, Muller, PRRD, I, 267-268, seems to imply that there is a possible rationale for this type of “theology” by means of some rhetorical questions. Why in the world and how in the world, he asks, would one “define a *theologia archetypa* which no creature, man or angel can possibly know? ... Besides, what possibly is its use -- if not to humble the theologian and to manifest his system as nothing but *dust* (italics, mine) from the outset?” Of course, this is not much of a rationale. We are told that what we cannot know (archetypally) we must adore and at the same time we must recognize that what we know (ectypally) is mere *dust* (See also Muller, PRRD, II, 204, for the so-called “accommodation of ‘the secret and unsearchable word of God and God’s unspeakable mysteries’ to the vehicle of the written word,” which “conforms to the distinction between the *theologia archetypa* and the *theologia ectypa*”). Candidly, it is *no wonder* that this “scheme” did not remain uncontested, especially since it was argued, apparently “by good and necessary consequence,” that due to its ectypal content (*dust*!) “Scripture is an imperfect and inappropriate instrument at its very best,” or even “that there is a certain degree of falsehood in human speech about God” (So, R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession*, 130, as quoted in Frame, *The Escondido Theology*, 98). Irony of irony, so much for this “good and necessary consequence” regarding our glorious and sole *principium cognoscendi* of the theological enterprise!

In the light (read: darkness) of this statement it totally stands to reason that by way of *countermove* several highly regarded critics in the bosom of Reformed orthodoxy, such as, Gomarus and Walaeus, “refused to develop the concept of archetypal theology (altogether) and began with knowledge of God as given in revelation,” that is, in Scripture. In a word, they “refuse to discuss or even to identify a *theologia* that stands beyond human grasp” (See Muller, PRRD, I, 232-233). This comports very well with Zwingli’s statement that “what God is we have as little knowledge from ourselves as a beetle has of what man is” (Quoted in Muller, PRRD, III, 87). After all, it is God’s “secret.” Therefore, it would be *hubris* even to embark upon “entering” it and seeking to “identify” it. At the least this restores the awesome dignity of Scripture as the sole *principium cognoscendi* available to finite creature man. Further, however tempting this may be and however understandable it may *seem* in the light of Gods majestic Transcendence, how could we be allowed to characterize a “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16) and inerrant Vehicle of his Verbal Self-disclosure *solely* (!) as “a faint image,” let alone as “*dust*,” without any biblical precedence to this effect? Effective and Fruitful Divine Accommodating Orientation that preempts an exhaustive grasp? Absolutely! But *merely* a Glimmer Footprint without further explanation, in fact, *counterbalance*? *Me Genoito* (Rom. 6:2). Otherwise (with all appropriate deference to the biblical Creator-creation distinction) it could never have been extolled as “The Word of our God that Stands Forever” (Is. 40:8b) in its clearly and repeatedly attested God-breathed “Perfection” (Ps.19:7). The critical, if not “condemning” *countermove* against the use of the archetypal-ectypal distinction which most likely was not really understood in its time nor possibly recognized in the present for what it is in the light of its widespread use, is certainly “a breath of fresh (Deut. 29:29a) air.” The bottom line is this. To call Bible language “inadequate” to cover our glorious God is one thing. But all those who call God’s Holy Writ “imperfect,” with the added adjectives, “defective” and “false,” supposedly as a “good and necessary consequence,” go a bridge too far. However attractive it may seem from an all too human perspective compared to the awesome transcendent glory of God, such “consequence” is *impermissible* in the light of the self-attestation of God’s Word and in violation of the incomprehensible complementarity of truth. *At the least*, by way of honoring this complementarity (with Ps. 19:7-9), it should *also* and *simultaneously* extol its glory, as we find in Bavinck, RD, II, 110, where he asserts of our knowledge of God that it is “a faint image, a faint likeness and a creaturely impression of the perfect knowledge that God has of himself,” but at the same time calls it “true, pure and trustworthy because it has for its foundation God’s self-consciousness and God’s self-revelation” (See for its glory, Mastricht, I, 113-201, as well). This once and for all cuts off even the idea that we “really” should transcend the language of Scripture if we want to arrive at the truth. Again, however attractive as a seemingly necessary and good consequence, it listens to a Siren Song. There is no indication in Scripture, none whatsoever that we should do so. Scripture is never this self-deprecating. Yes, it tells us that there are limits to our understanding. There is incomprehensible truth that we cannot and may not (seek to) “plumb.” But it never relativizes its language. As I argue further below, any such conclusion is impermissible and inadmissible. More about this later as well when we hear Calvin weigh in on this.

Not so incidentally, the mantra, “thinking God’s thoughts after him,” may well be woven of the same questionable cloth. We find this mantra in the thinking of both Thomas Aquinas and Cornelius Van Til (See for this, Fesko, RA, 154; Bavinck mentions this occasionally as well, RD, I, 588). Both basically call for humans to mirror God’s archetypal thoughts ectypally. But because univocity is out, it only can and must be done

“analogically,” whatever this means (as we shall see). Of course, the question arises how and why in the world would we and could we focus on God’s “essential” thoughts that in this underlying basically contrastive (archetypal-ectypal) scheme are not even available to us? So, this is a “mirage” and essentially a dead-end street! Candidly, all of us better scrap this underlying scheme and make all our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, that is, to God’s thoughts *as* they are clearly revealed and exhibited in God’s inerrant Word in Holy Writ! No more and no less! This is to say, do not follow in Plato’s footsteps and stop positing and philosophizing about a so-called Upper Story! Besides, take a close look at Plato’s Upper Story. It is fully intelligible since it is populated by known universals (Forms) in contrast to the faint particulars (Matter). But it is also fully self-contradictory since the “Many” universals in the Upper Story somehow find their origin in the One, also part of the Upper Story. So, on the one hand, there is the first and fundamental contrast between the One (Upper Story) and the Many (faint replica). But “suddenly” there is a derivative, equally contrastive One and Many, of all things, *in* the Upper story (See for this conclusion also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 7). Incidentally, this is where Plotinian Neo-Platonism comes in. It seeks to solve the latter conundrum by its concept of “emanation.” In the Upper Story, the One spills over (emanates) in the many Universals. Be this as it may, it should be a total enigma why anyone would and how anyone could come up with an archetypal story, along Platonic lines. For one thing, Plato’s intelligible and self-contradictory rationalistic and impersonal (!) Upper Story is poles apart from what scholasticism would understand the trans-rational and Personal archetypal story to be. So, it would a bait-and-switch operation. But even more telling, the so-called archetypal story is not only incomprehensible territory (God’s a-temporal thinking, willing and feeling are way beyond us). It is also forbidden territory. So, drop the Plato inspired Scheme, and with Gomarus and Walaeus go by the Word alone for God’s thoughts, God’s will, and God’s emotions (more about the “hot button” of his emotions below). This Spotlight simply wants to get across how easy it is to overlook or ignore the incomprehensible and non-contradictory complementarity of truth and its sole harmonious and peaceful lodging place in the regenerate heart (more about this below as well), and to waste our time and energy in “endless classifications.” They are increasingly refined, but overlook, if not ignore Deut. 29:29 and do not serve “the obedience of faith” which, according to Paul, is and should be the objective of the total theological enterprise (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) (See for this scholastic “refinement” that has had its day, Muller, PRRD, I, throughout, but in the area of our present concern, esp. PRRD, I, 225-247. For the substantive and terminological “quagmire” that accompanies the archetype-ectype scheme in this context, see once again, PRRD, II, 204 and 233-234). Incidentally, all this is not to say that the archetype-ectype distinction can never be used in a biblical fashion. When God creates man in his own image, there is clearly a biblical and so *revealed* and *exhibited* archetype and ectype. But more about “the image of God” below.

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It is utterly regrettable that in the history of the Church the defiant *hubris* of the human mind is very much in evidence in the Trinitarian controversy. It is well-known that Sabellius put the Oneness of God in his mind and promptly evicted the Threeness. Arius did the same with the Threeness and the Oneness was eliminated. Ten Centuries later the same virus showed up in Arminianism. Give Divine Sovereignty a permanent lodging place in the human mind and human freedom (responsibility) must bite the dust. A robot-like existence is supposedly unavoidable. On the other hand, provide a firm anchorage for human freedom (responsibility) in that same mind, and Divine Sovereignty must be sent packing. It supposedly becomes intolerable.³⁰ The Scriptural teaching which insists on the harmonious and fruitful *concursus* of both is anathema to Arminianism. As I further detail below, the culprit, of course, is the methodological primacy or ultimacy of the human intellect with its single occupancy over that of the heart as man’s life-mission control center with its double occupancy. After all, God placed eternity in it, so that it could be the (only) lodging place for

³⁰ The questionable Free-will Defense of the existence of God is based upon this Arminian type of argument.

his “eternal verities,” and double as a cognitive, volitional as well as emotional resting place (Eccl. 3:11).³¹

The Supralapsarian – Infralapsarian issue may also have sought to cross “a bridge too far.”³² The question arose what *logically* came first in the Divine Mind, predestination, to safeguard the sovereignty of God, or the Fall, to maintain the responsibility of man? Without judging intentions, since there simply is no “before or after” in the Divine Mind, whether temporally *or* logically, the question is illegitimate. Both sides of the issue should have confessed Divine sovereignty and human responsibility and *left it at that*, refusing to pry into things “too wonderful,” and resisting the temptation extensively to write about it, at least to the extent they and their successors did. Instead, they should have called for worship in the spirit of Romans 11:36 and following in the footsteps of the apostles they should have fully redeemed their precious time by going from “door to door” (Acts 5:28, 42; 13:49; 20:20) in order “to make disciples” (Mt. 28:19), subsequently “to baptize them,” and finally to “teach them to observe whatever God commands” (Mt. 28:20). These three components of Christ’s Grand Triple Command that overarches everything in history are the only (and exclusive!) mandates that are left for the NT Church to obey.³³ Therefore, they must not only be the “grand and magnificent obsession” of the heart of its membership, but also the object of their hot pursuit, taking aim at and climbing “the hills of ‘souls’ and ‘holiness.’” That this was characteristic of the early Church (Acts 4:31; 6:7; 11:19) and by comparison leaves much to be desired in today’s Church, are two *undeniable* facts. All this goes to say that anything that in its implication or consequences detracts from this overarching Triple Command must immediately be viewed with suspicion and quickly avoided at any price. To pursue anything else as a priority can essentially be nothing else but idolatrous (1 Sam. 15:22-23b; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 1 John 5:21).

In all candor, whenever and to the extent that all these types of *theo-ontology* take center stage, which as the term conveys goes illegitimately after *essence* rather than obediently after *ethics*, the submission to the Grand Triple Command suffers proportionately. An honest self-examination on the part of all advocates and practitioners of this deadly malady will undoubtedly reveal this. It is equally certain that the literally innumerable theological volumes, dedicated “to penetrate the impenetrable,” will be eager fuel for the gigantic

³¹ Someone once pleaded with an Arminian, who fully embraced the doctrine of the Trinity with his regenerate heart, to lodge the admittedly biblical sovereignty-responsibility teaching in the same spot. When it dawned upon him that this was the only way to handle Scripture in the case of every one of its doctrines with a view to immediate action (Ps. 119:11), he was cured of his error in less than an hour’s time.

³² See for this assessment, Bavinck, RD, II, 382-392, esp. 388-392.

³³ The requirement of Baptism with the Trinitarian formula, which Christ locates between the first and third prong of his Grand Command, is telling. The reference to the Trinity implies in retrospect that the Gospel which “produces” disciples in evangelistic outreach is trinitarian in nature. The reference to baptism implies in prospect that it is the starting point for a “walk in the Word.” Both receive further attention below. Not so incidentally, careful attention should be given to the fact that the first and third prong are sequential as well as consequential. With baptism as their *trait-d’union* these two relate to each other as the infra-structure and the super-structure of the Christian life, both of which are equally necessary and therefore must be given equal weight at the appropriate time and in the appropriate setting. Incidentally, just in case this raises a question regarding the “Ten” Commandments, the Decalogue is fully a part of the third prong of Christ’s Grand Triple Command. At any rate, in the (local) Church the Gospel *out-reach* must take place under the leadership of the Evangelist (Eph. 4:11c), and the Word *in-reach* under that of the Pastor-Teacher (Eph. 4:11d). Both leaders, of course, are facilitated by members of the Diaconate who serve as the Quartermasters of the Church and provide the logistics, the wherewithal, for its leadership as well as its membership to execute their respective ministries, where and when called upon. This “wherewithal” resembles the oil that makes an engine “purr” (shalom) and so ensures that the vehicle is “on the move” (productive enablement)!

bonfire in the last day that will consume all the “wood, hay and stubble” (1 Cor. 3:12-15) which the Church has produced throughout the centuries and to which, equally without a doubt, everyone to his shame and necessary dismay did, does, or will contribute to one degree or another.

To put it in a nutshell, the moment theology seeks to puzzle out and determine the being of God, as well as of things and events that are “too wonderful,” it turns into a theo-ontology by definition and thereby stands condemned on the spot.³⁴ The Westminster Confession of

³⁴ Scholars have properly differentiated theo-ontology from onto-theology. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8, 94, 222. From my perspective, while taking Vanhoozer into account, theo-ontology takes its points of departure in God “as a revealed truth,” “proceeds to reason,” and focuses on being, essence, as it develops its thinking. Onto-theology starts with “a Supreme Being or Unmoved Mover” and may or may not add the God-nomenclature later. If it does, it is committed to an independent “natural theology” that lays a foundation for revealed theology. Theo-ontology does not necessarily go that route, if at all. As we saw, theology often goes by the motto, *Fides Quaerit Intellectum*. This is, literally, “faith seeks comprehension” or “faith requests the intellect to assist it.” Here faith in revealed truth leads the way. No contest! But those who are committed to this motto (“swear” by it) often (usually?) regard it “as gross negligence not to put the intellect to work to understand truths comprehensively.” It would “systematize truths,” provide “a clearer insight in them,” and in the process “lay a foundation for them.” So, Storig, I, 226, 230. Apparently, in this context faith cannot quite or fully stand on its own two feet. It needs a “crutch.” Theo-ontology adds a further dimension. Faith does (must?) use the intellect to grasp the *being* of things, often philosophically. More about its possible pitfalls later. But for now, once the nose of the camel is in the tent, it is relatively easy for Anselm’s principle, *Credo Ut Intelligam* (I believe--as a fixed starting point--that I may understand--fully through human reason) to turn into Abelard’s contrastive starting point, *Intelligo Ut Credam* (I understand that I may believe). See for this, Storig, GF, I, 232. History puts this on display when the Anselmian Medieval and Reformed Scholasticism degenerated into an Abelardian rationalism in the 17th Century. See for this Muller, PRRD, I, 443-445. To be sure, neither type of Scholasticism may have explicitly laid the foundation for it. But they may well have implicitly opened the door for it. At any rate, with the *Fides Quaerit Intellectum* guideline both theology and theo-ontology diverge from, if not run counter to another one, *Fides Quadrat Intellectum*, which was formulated in the 1940’s by Prof. Dr. K. Schilder. Faith, taking its cue from Scripture, does not just *ask* the intellect to assist it in gaining (a systematic, clearer, founding) understanding. No, it *squares*, shapes the intellect to take (a more incisive, progressively purposeful) action (2 Cor. 10:5). The difference should be palpable. The first, *pre*-Reformation motto (*Quaerit*) was formulated by thinkers who did not believe that the intellect was ravaged and corrupted by sin, even if it was regarded as weakened by some (Bonaventure). This is, why it was enticing to them and conducive for Aquinas to adopt Aristotle as *the* philosopher to adorn the articles of faith with “intelligibility.” The second, *post*-Reformation one (*Quadrat*) went by a totally different tune! All human thinking was desecrated and ruined by sin. Behind it, of course, was a radically different view of the human heart as man’s life-mission control center. Pre-Reformation had no hunch that the human heart was wicked to the core and therefore could hold to the freedom of the will with a corresponding optimism about the use of human reason. The Reformation started with the utter need of a heart transplant in regeneration to sanitize the will and square the intellect. Even if Post-Reformation orthodoxy fully understood the difference between *quaerit* and *quadrat*, the question may well be asked whether it fully understood the DNA, and, therewith, the implications of the Medieval *quaerit* bandwagon that operated on the basis of an ultimately “unscathed” intellect!

In this context it may be well to refer to two other principles. The Medievals held to the scholastic adage *Naturam Perficit Gratia* in which nature is analyzed as defective (merely), but subsequently presented as (unambiguously) perfectible. The Reformation countered with *Naturam Convertit Gratia* in which nature is said to be totally and radically affected by, if not soaked in sin, and consequently stands in need of conversion. All this goes to say in the present context that Post-Reformation scholasticism better watch out not to go the questionable *Quaerit* or *Perficit* route that, by definition, is fraught with the enticement to make the incomprehensible intelligible. Quickly and often it royally and thankfully states that it differs dramatically in its Theological (Reformation) *Song* from Medieval Roman-Catholic scholasticism. So far, so good, if not excellent. But at the same time, it too quickly and too often holds that it can (must?) keep the same (be it modified!) Aristotelian *Tune* on a “carefully marked path of Augustinianism and (equally modified) forms of Thomism and Scotism” (Muller, PRRD, I, 449). at times with the comment, *of all things*, that this is *needed* (sic!) to explain and ground truth. Especially the use of and emphasis upon

Faith, I, 6, properly asserts the legitimacy to endorse and embrace doctrines that can (must?) be derived (deduced) from Scripture by “good (sound, legitimate) and necessary (logical, not arbitrary) consequence,” doctrines, such as, the Holy Trinity, for instance. A recent well-researched and well-written volume underscores the propriety of this Westminster Confession “phraseology” by referring to telling instances of its evidential occurrence in Scripture (Acts 1:20-22; 2:25-31; 1 Cor. 9:9-10; Hebr. 1:10-12), but especially by pointing to the Lord Jesus who exemplifies it in a variety of settings (Mt. 22:29-32; Lk. 24:25-27).³⁵ No wonder that the Church followed suit throughout its history.³⁶

Nevertheless, at least two words of (extreme?) caution are called for. First, not all “consequences” that on the surface seem to be necessary do, by definition, have God’s *imprimatur* stamped upon it. This is to say there are drawn consequences in which the “sound” and the (seemingly) “logical” part company.

Spotlight IV

Samples of Consequences that are neither good nor necessary and should be shunned! (Martin Luther, Abraham Kuyper)

We may think of Luther’s “take” on the copula “is” in the statement, “This *is* my body.” His intractable insistence that this spells “identity” prompted him to develop the doctrine of “consubstantiation.” He refused to acknowledge that from a dictionary point of view it was equally legitimate to interpret it as “This represents or symbolizes my Body.” As someone once perceptively stated in response to Luther’s stance, “when Christ tells us, ‘I *am* the Door,’ no one will start looking for a literal door!” Luther’s “consequential” view produced an utterly regrettable and damaging rift among the Reformers.

A second instance could even be more regrettable and more damaging. Abraham Kuyper’s cultural edifice is undeniably awesome. “There is not one square inch of which Jesus does not say, ‘it is mine.’” This “superstructure” has understandably been met with wide acclaim, especially in academic institutions. There is hardly Christian College or University that does not wish to be “Kuyperian” in this way. However, it is not too well-known that, to justify pedobaptism, he constructed his doctrine of “presumptive regeneration” as “the necessary and sufficient condition” for this practice. In short order, his train of thought started with his point of departure, which was twofold. First, the New Covenant was made with Christ and in Christ with the elect. Second, pedobaptism was not negotiable. But rather than to conclude with the Reformed Baptists that baptism as the sign and seal of the New Covenant had to be postponed until regeneration as proof of election, and so of

the *need* for this is extremely troubling. In fact, it must be rejected out of hand! At any rate, this is already an indication that Post-Reformation scholastics adopts more than a mere methodology from its Medieval predecessors. Combine all this with the *quaerit* approach that reserves a place for “unscathed” human reason, and the thesis that it arguably opened the door to a full-blown rationalism, be it implicitly, cannot be lightly dismissed

³⁵ Ryan M. McGraw, *By Good and Necessary Consequence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 6-16. See also Turretin, IET, I, 37-47; William J. van Asselt & Eef Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 241-245. Muller, PRRD, I, 401, attests to the propriety of this hermeneutical tool as well, “Reason does not introduce into the text of Scripture a meaning that is not present, but rather serves faith by drawing legitimate conclusions from the text.”

³⁶ McGraw, 17-56. According to W. J. Van Asselt, “Cocceius Anti-Scholasticus?” in Van Asselt & Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 241-245, the doctrine of legitimate logical conclusions came into its widespread own in the works of the “Medieval doctors,” and continued to be warmly embraced by Reformed scholars as exemplified in Scripture and therefore “as an integral part of exegetical method.” It would draw *Sacra Doctrina* and *Sacra Theologia* from *Sacra Pagina*. This is to say, in a legitimate syllogism, the terminology used in the major as well as the minor should be borrowed from Scripture, either *expressis verbis* or with reference to it.

covenant membership, was in evidence, he based the baptism of infants upon the presumptive presence of regeneration, apparently “by good and necessary consequence.” As a result of this construct the summons to regeneration virtually vanished in the many Reformed Churches where folks bought into his reasoning. This, in turn, demolished the necessary “infra-structure” of his awesome “superstructure.” After all, where there is no physical birth, there is no physical life. In fact, there cannot be! Similarly, where there is no spiritual birth, there is no spiritual life. In fact, there cannot be. The regrettable outcome was that Kuyper’s “superstructure” collapsed in his native country, where at one time he was heralded as its Prime Minister. There is hardly a more progressively liberal nation on this earth than the Netherlands, inclusive of abortion and at times doctors’ enforced *euthanasia*. Kuyper’s “good and necessary consequence” was at least partly responsible for opening the floodgates to its undoubtedly unintended outcome. Without “widespread” rebirth, the floodgates of rebellious vileness are increasingly open. Candidly, the early (baby?) Reformation Creeds that governed the Reformation Churches in Kuyper’s homeland (The 1561 Belgic Confession of Faith (BC) and the 1563 Heidelberg Catechism (HC)) were not too helpful either. They both do mention regeneration. But they either did not define it at all (HC, Q/A, 8) or defined it wrongly as “progressive sanctification” (BC, Art. 21).

At any rate, already a cursory look at Church History already will show that these two samples of “good and necessary conclusions” can be duplicated numerous, if not innumerable times. All in all, while there is every reason to display an animus for “the formula,” care should be taken not to turn it into a Siren Song. It may be more than advisable to add that “any good and necessary consequence” better proves to be embedded in a systematic theology that covers the sum-total of biblical data. Many pedobaptists hold that precisely at this point Kuyper fell short, making their appeal to Calvin and his input. The latter held that the Covenant, including the New Covenant, was made with parents and their children and that the administration of baptism was based upon the New Covenant promises of God (Jer. 31:31ff; Ezek. 36:25-27) and not upon the presence of anything in man. That would invalidate many a baptism in retrospect, regardless whether it was administered in a Pedobaptism or Credobaptism setting. But be this as it may, alarm bells must start ringing when from a systematic theological perspective something “jarring” comes into play which conveys that the “good” is not as “good” and the “necessary” is not as “necessary” as assumed. In all this Jesus is and must be our model. He shows that the Pharisaic labor-prohibitions for the Sabbath, adopted by their type of “good and necessary consequence,” runs headlong into the pattern of truth laid out by God himself (Mt. 12:1-14; Mk. 2:23-3:6; Lk. 6:1-11). Similarly, he roundly condemns folks for destroying God’s truth by appealing to the “Corban” formula to withhold the necessary parental care (Mt. 15:1-9; Mk. 7:1-12). This more than should convince everybody to be properly fearful of one’s so-called “sound and logical reasoning.” It is simply astounding, in fact, more than astounding, that Jesus did not even get a hearing. This goes a long way to show how easily folks can be foolishly blind. Apparently, we may well go off the deep end before we know, and, adding insult to injury, refuse to acknowledge it, even if our noses are pressed upon it. See also, Van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 242-243.

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But there is a second and even more serious word of caution. There is every biblical reason to add a third and utterly necessary adjective to this formula, namely, “by good, necessary *and permissible* consequence.” After all, Scripture insists that to venture into “the secret things of God” is never allowed! It is out of bounds for any, and all finite and therefore limited human reasoning, however sound (good) and logical (necessary) it may seem to the human mind. Whenever, wherever, or however an *impermissible* and therefore *inadmissible* consequence makes its appearance, an immediate summons to repentance, that is, to renounce one’s *hubris* and to desist from one’s defiance, whether intentional or not, is the first and only order of business.³⁷ This statement may sound shocking for a fleeting moment, but should not come as too much of a surprise. After all, Church History in general and the

³⁷ Muller, PRRD, I, 382, hints at the occurrence of logical consequences that are impermissible, when he writes, “Aristotle clearly taught concepts that, although logically acceptable, did not conform to Christian revelation (for example the uninvolved immutability of the first mover). However, in Muller, PRRD, I, 420, he does not state this *verbatim* when he covers the correct use of “syllogistic logic” to arrive at “conclusions that are essentially biblical.”

Reformation in particular, are firmly and indisputably committed to the impermissibility and inadmissibility *principle*. The Church has staunchly declared it impermissible and inadmissible to undercut the “One-ness” of God in the light of his Three-ness and *vice versa*. The Reformation took the exact same approach in the Divine Sovereignty-human responsibility issue. In both instances heterodoxy, if not heresy was told in no uncertain terms that so-called good and necessary human rationality does and must come to a (screeching) halt, where the Divine “secrets” begin, whether ontological or otherwise!³⁸ In word, it recognized and embraced that the intellect was “on a permanent leash!”

At any rate, all this is extensively argued in the present context, not just to arrive at a correct theological position. Frankly, it should be furthest from anyone’s mind merely to pursue “pure theology” for the sake of “*mere* theology,” and then, after formulating it, be (self-righteously?) content to go home, and somewhat provocatively, curl up on one’s potato couch, and drink one’s root-beer. No, any “theological undertaking” must focus upon and aim at safeguarding and advancing both the unfettered, unalloyed, uninterrupted and utterly precious jubilant worship of Almighty God (Ps. 95:1ff; 96:1ff; 97:1ff; 98:1ff; 99:1ff; 100:1ff; etc., etc.) and the comprehensive splendor of holiness (Ps. 96:9), required to engage in all acceptable worship, *as their biblically explicit and expressed implication and consequence*.³⁹ As mentioned already, after Pentecost this splendor is proportionate to the obedience that is concentrated on and exhausted by Christ’s Grand Triple Command trumpeted just prior to his Ascension and to be reverberated throughout World History.

The bottom line is this. Any teaching or publication, also in the area of Divine Immutability and Simplicity, that sins against the complementarity of truth, which is marked by mystery wherever it is found in Scripture, by seeking to enter this mystery and plumb its *essence*, is bound to feed the bonfire of “wood, hay, and stubble” (1 Cor. 3:12-13) on Judgment Day. Its shame can only be compounded by the recognition that the enormous amounts of time spent to do so either orally or by means of the written page could and should have served the glory of God and the eternal wellbeing of folks by putting all of one’s eggs in the basket of Christ’s Triple Command that calls for the *ethics* of uninterrupted and unrelenting “pursuit of souls and holiness” to end up with “an innumerable multitude,” “clothed in (the) white robes” of blood bought holiness (Rev. 7:9, 14). Candidly, in the admittedly only handful of Seminaries and Universities in which I have been involved as student or instructor this “ethics” was not very noticeable and even less visible.

Once again, the heartbeat of all “mysterious” complementary truth is that the two poles that make up this truth are mutually exclusive *to the finite human mind*. Hence, they cannot be explained, let alone reconciled or synthesized by it. Since the mind has single occupancy only, like a Motel 6, it cannot accommodate both poles at the same time and therefore is both incapable of showing the rhyme and reason of their polarity *and* forbidden to pursue its essence by definition. However, this complementary truth fits snugly in the regenerate heart.

³⁸ In the early Church the Divine “One-ness” was not allowed to “swallow up” the equally Divine “Three-ness,” nor vice versa, and in the Reformation Divine Sovereignty was not given to destroy human responsibility, and vice versa. The “good and necessary consequence rule” clearly has its creaturely limits, not to be transgressed in any way, shape, or form.

³⁹ This is “caught” in the identification of theology as “application.” While the phraseology is open to some criticism, it is a worthy “remedial” response to theology as merely a sterile mental edifice, however impressive it may be. It is also exemplified, as we saw, by R. L. Dabney who in his homiletics, published as *Evangelical Eloquence*, 30, 40, 52, insists that his preacher and teacher readers always should formulate “a call to action,” based upon and required by the preached or taught text.

Since God places eternity in it, it has double occupancy, like a Hilton. Hence it can encompass and lodge both poles of all complementary truth simultaneously (Eccl. 3:11a). Emphatically without the ability to plumb its incomprehensible depth (Eccl. 3:11b)! But just as emphatically, more than sufficient to take the mandated decisive and effective action.

At this point the inevitable question arises! Is the human mind willing to recognize its limitation and forego any defiant attempts to chase the impossible as well as the forbidden? This is, is it willing to concede the explicit mandated reality of “*impermissibility*” and “*inadmissibility*,” only to be overlooked, ignored or opposed to one’s hurt, or even to one’s self-destruction in whatever way? Frankly, as the verbiage already implies, *theo-ontology* that focuses upon “*essence*” of whatever kind and to whatever degree basically refuses to be child-like in humble recognition of its creaturely limitation (Ps. 131:1-2), and vies to be “*god-like*” in its pursuit of or its travel toward a so-called “*Grand Theory of Everything*.” Essentially and at least implicitly it may well be telling God to move over and go out of the way of the (autonomous?) human mind, whether consciously and intentionally or not.⁴⁰

If and when *theo-ontology* is *substantially* governed by an unregenerate heart as its life-mission control center, it has once and for all vitiated the only possible lodging place of truth, at least apart from and barring conversion, and is forever doomed to pursue a Sisyphus course of thinking. This is the tragic reality in crystal clear evidence in all types of empty and deceitful philosophies (Col. 2:8), including not only the Platonic, Aristotelian and Plotinian type, but also the *content*-scholastic ones, whether Roman-Catholic, Protestant or otherwise, that lean heavily on them and take their cue from them.⁴¹

If and when it *methodologically* operates, whether consciously and intentionally or not, in spite of the presence of a regenerate heart, it is not content to lodge complementary truth where it belongs, namely, in this (beckoning) heart, which only can and does provide the joy of the cognitive (volitional and emotional) rest that comes with it. Rather, it seeks to penetrate

⁴⁰ This brings into view the warning of Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc, 2020), “Intellectuals like to appear learned and be called wise. Yet there are many things the knowledge of which does little or no good to the soul, and he who concerns himself about other things that those that lead to salvation is very unwise ... Do not be proud, therefore, because of your learning and skill. Rather, fear because of the talent given you. If you know many things, realize that there is much you do not know.” And, he could have added, “much that is either incomprehensible or out of bounds.” To the degree one meddles with this anyway, one limits oneself to aim at contemplative and controlling assessment of essence and more than runs the risk to leave the ministerial pathway which one is mandated actively to walk in conscious and intentional pursuit of the salvation of sinners, as defined by Jesus in his Grand Triple Command (Mt. 28:19-20). This can never be emphasized too frequently in light (read: in the darkness) of the admittedly miserable percentage of Christians who ever (read: never) did, do, or will share the Gospel.

⁴¹ In my opinion, to substantiated further below, the thesis that “*scholasticism*” is no more and no less than a harmless organizing *method* of the biblical data that aims at producing a well-rounded systematic theology must be (seriously?) questioned. To be sure, it can function as an acceptable “*academic method*.” See below as well! But *content*-wise, based on and set in motion by the early Western philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, which fundamentally equates thinking and being, it is *theo-ontological* in its very core, in fact, with a vengeance as it seeks to grasp and define the essence of “the heavenly things” that for all practical purposes Christ may well have declared to be “out of bounds” (John 3:12) as “too wonderful,” thus complementing the OT testimony (See once again Job 5:9; 9:10, 32; 42:3; Ps. 131:1-3). In his seven-volume *magnum opus*, based upon the text of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, K. J. Popma, *Levensbeschouwing* I-VII (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1958ff) has done the Church of Christ an inestimable service by pointing out the apostate root and nature as well as the pervasive and destructive influence of the *theo-ontological* tradition throughout the centuries! He explains his title *Levensbeschouwing* as a view of one’s world and life that is not theoretically static but demands, calls for, and practically exemplifies hands-on obedience. In a word, it deals with ideas that are displayed in *manifest* consequences. If James had been around, he would have loudly applauded. In fact, he does so *in absentia* (Jam. 1: 22-25)!

the impenetrable and to make it intelligible. In either case there are always, whether to a smaller or greater degree, two inevitable casualties, with a third one waiting in the wings. The first casualty is the unadulterated child-like worship of God. The second casualty is the unreserved obedience to God. Thirdly, whenever and wherever theo-ontology comes up with a settled and basically man-made view or a finalized, basically man-produced doctrine that, regardless the terminology in which it is couched, is not and cannot be authenticated by Scripture, and ends up insisting on ecclesiastical submission to it, it is bound to result in tragic church splits with all the misery of heart and the downgrade of ministry that this entails. But more about this potential threefold tragedy below! At any rate, from this perspective it is an evidence of the sheer grace of God that Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians never “demonized” each other, despite their differences.

All this was necessary to determine the parameters that must be honored to bring the study of any Biblical concept to a successful conclusion, inclusive that of Divine Immutability. Complementarity of truth which spells mystery must be respected in a child-like fashion. No arrogant efforts should be made to encroach on mysteries which are the unfathomable secrets of God. Scripture by itself and in its totality should be the sole source and the final arbiter of every theological undertaking. Such undertaking will only meet with the smile of God’s approval when it aims at and produces the ethics of faith, which after Pentecost comes down to an ever increased and increasing all-encompassing and all-determining pursuit of Christ’s Triple Command. Those who have come face to face with the multiple, often conflicting views on Divine Immutability will find it hard to deny the need of at least some parameters.

After this is said and done, the thesis from which I proceed is the following. All those who overlook, ignore, reject, or oppose the complementarity of truth will, by definition, end up with and be victimized by a (mentally) *contrastive* view of the two poles. I argue in the present volume that a contrastive view has three strikes against it. First, it is rooted in a substantially unregenerate heart or in a methodologically impure regenerate heart. Second, it puts all its time and energy to work maximally to synthesize and harmonize the polarity it faces or minimally at least to explain it to one degree or another or to make it somewhat intelligible. Third, regardless the increasingly erudite efforts it puts in to come up with a solution, it always fails and ends up with a fractured and often a chaotic situation. In short, it starts with misery, continues with misery, and ends with misery, academically, ecclesiastically, and personally.

This misery is on display in the philosophy that Paul describes as “empty deceit” (Col. 2:8). As I argue in Section II, shoulder to shoulder with Frederick Copleston,⁴² the total History of Philosophy aims at solving the one-and-many problem, or in philosophical terminology, the universality-particularity relationship. This relationship has its foundational “prototype” and origin in the originating Triune God, one God in three Persons. It has its reflective “copy” and mirror image in created reality with its ubiquitous one-and-many spheres in human society, such as marriage, the family, the state, the church and the business, in the animate world, such as an elephant herd, a beehive, an ant hill and a school of fish, and in the inanimate world, such as, one floor with many tiles, a forest with many trees, the nature of light as a wave and a particle, the general theory of relativity and

⁴² See for this, Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1962), I/1, 36, 39, 40, 56, 57, 65, 76, and esp. 93-97, and the interaction with him in **Spotlight VII**. For the one-and-many issue, see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2; XII, 10.

quantum physics, a Jurassic Park with “one” Electric Fence and “many” Velociraptors.⁴³ The issue is twofold.

First, the harmonious and peaceful co-existence of universality and particularity in the Uncreated Triune God is a mystery, one of his ontological “secrets.” The finite human mind with its single occupancy simply cannot grasp it. In seeking to synthesize the non-synthesizable *from a finite human perspective*, it also does and must tilt either toward universality or particularity and therefore always fails to reach its objective. This produces the ever ongoing and at times vicious warfare between the tilting parties that engulfs the waterfront of life, inclusive Church and Academia, and leaves fractured, if not war-torn landscapes in its wake. Harmony is and remains elusive. But, irony of ironies from the biblical and Christian perspective, the clearly harmonious and peaceful complementarity does fit, in fact, only fits in the regenerate heart that is created with the capacity of double occupancy (Eccl. 3:8) and is content “as a weaned child” (Ps. 131:2-4) with lodging the unexplainable there. When this heart apostatizes from God, whether in substance or method, it seeks to take the law in its own hand and to penetrate the impenetrable. But it ever does and ever must fail in its ever-continuing synthesizing and harmonizing efforts, bound to resemble Sisyphus. Incomprehensibility never did, never does, and never will yield its “secrets.” The bottom line is a “winged word.” “Humans grow crooked in their humanity when they ignore, overlook, deny, or protest the exquisite worth of ‘not-knowing,’ whether scholastically or rationalistically. Job 28 speaks at length about the wisdom not to be found by man (only in God) and in short order about the wisdom that is meant for him and is put at his disposal (Fear God and pursue holiness). Job knows full well that authentic humanity goes hand in hand with the inability-to-know. In 26:14 he speaks about the breadth and the depth of human not-knowing. We know the outside of God’s ways and a weak echo of his footsteps. But the thunder of his power we *cannot* understand.”⁴⁴

Second, the harmonious and peaceful co-existence in the created one-and-many spheres can only be obtained by an epistemology that listens to the Book of God’s instruction, Holy Writ (*Sola Scriptura* as well as *Tota Scriptura*). No independent man-made philosophy yields this outcome. Further, it can only be realized by an ethics that mirrors the conduct of God in the practicalities of life. That is, through self-denial in love and holiness. Unbelief can never produce this triad, even if God’s common goodness often graces mankind with his “orchids” that temper the selfishness, the hatreds, and the corruption.

It is crystal-clear that apostate philosophy, of whatever type, in its attempt to penetrate the impenetrable and solve the unsolvable did, does and ever will end up in a mess of

⁴³ I argue in the Introduction to my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 17-33, that Michael Crichton, the author of *Jurassic Park*, seeks to solve the one-and-many problem in this bestseller and also offer the reason why he did and could not but fail. In it he recognizes the adversarial relationship of universality and particularity, the Electric Fence (representing universality) and the Velociraptors (representing particularity). The Chaos scientist scoffs that the synthesis is an impossibility. He proved to be right on the money. The “particulars” broke through the “universality” which resulted in a blood bath. At the end of the book, however, the author pictures a landscape where harmony and peace appear to win out. But this is clearly “wishful thinking.” In *The Lost World* he tackles the Evolution Problem, but, as I explain in my SR, it does not fare much better. At any rate, “philosophically” these two volumes are much superior than the movie versions!

⁴⁴ K. J. Popma, *De Boodschap van het Boek Job* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, NV, 1957), 222. The “weakness” of this echo does not make him conclude that Scripture resembles “dust.” Throughout his oeuvre he glories in Scripture and in this he honors the complementarity of truth.

“misery,” ontologically, epistemologically and ethically.⁴⁵ It created chaos academically (Ancient Greek philosophy, culminating in the Plato-Aristotle “animosity”), societally (Ancient Greek history, culminating in the Sparta-Athens “hostility”) and personally (Ancient Greek religion, culminating on the Athens-Socrates “enmity”).

Against this backdrop the question may well be asked whether theologies that piggyback on apostate philosophy are not liable, if not bound to face the same quagmire? It appears, as we shall see, that in the Middle Ages scholasticism has routinely opened itself up to Platonian, Aristotelian and Plotinian influences. In doing so, did it go beyond a generally accepted “methodology” and incorporate (willy-nilly?) flawed, if not stained “content?” This is a pivotal as well as contested issue. There is an increasing if not widespread conviction that “scholasticism refers not to a particular curriculum or corpus of teachings but (to) a contemplative methodology expressed though *lectio* and *disputatio*.” The virtual conclusion is that even when it uses Platonic, Aristotelian or Plotinian “forms,” it does not adopt a “particular philosophy but (only) a philosophical methodology.”⁴⁶ In all candor, I intend to argue that Medieval scholasticism when it incorporates philosophical considerations of the Platonian, Aristotelian and Plotinian variety is no longer merely a *method*-scholasticism, but at times (often?) does (cannot but?) turn into a *content*-scholasticism and therefore must be analyzed and assessed as such.⁴⁷ When advocates of a Reformed scholasticism openly and insistently call for a “recovery of Reformed Thomism,” which “synthesizes biblical revelation and Aristotle,” that is, for “theology in a Reformed and Thomistic key,” in order to explain and defend the truth of Scripture, it stands in *need* (sic!) of a similar analysis and assessment.⁴⁸

One thing is and should be crystal clear. There is no indication that Medieval scholasticism even had a hunch of, let alone was filled with compassionate horror, like Tertullian, about the God-forsaking, in fact, God-and-his-truth-suppressing character and content of “the empty and deceitful” philosophies of its day, that either portrayed or already had ended up in a futile and fraudulent quagmire.⁴⁹ The question may well be asked whether post-Reformation scholasticism up to the present day is really cognizant of this. To be candid, I hope that anyone who reads this will be dismayed about this shortfall, and tremble at its implications. After all, how can it remain “spotless” when it all too uncritically follows in the footsteps of its predecessor or heartily and unreservedly recommends it?

⁴⁵ Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1990) records in stark colors the ethical debauchery that characterized the lives of all those who in their rebellion against God epistemologically sought and failed to solve the ontology of the universe and its history. These “intellectuals” include the world’s “icons,” such as Rousseau, Marx, Hemingway, Russell, and Sartre, who helped send mankind into a downward spiral. This should make us appreciative, if not embrace the diagnosis of Paul, “Empty Deceit,” and welcome the alarm raised by Tertullian, “Get rid of Athens.”

⁴⁶ See Charles J. Rennie, “THEOLOGICAL THEOLOGY: A working Reflection on Theological Studies in the University and Seminary Contexts,” in *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* (2017), 52.

⁴⁷ Kamphuis, 29, apparently has made up his mind when he characterizes “the scholastic concept of immutability nothing but the import of apostate philosophy in Christian theology.”

⁴⁸ Craig A. Carter, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Metaphysics: Why we need to recover Christian Platonism,” in *Journal of IRBS Theological Seminary* (2019), 6-7, 25.

⁴⁹ Wolterstorff, IG, 283ff, admirably counsels the Church never to lose sight of Tertullian’s “enduring question” what “Jerusalem has to do with Athens,” and his equally enduring warning never to be or become bedfellows with destructive philosophies. Wolterstorff clearly applies this not only to movements, such as Reformed scholasticism, of which he is not exactly a fond friend, but also to himself.

In a nutshell, folks who operate from (are victimized by) a “contrastive” starting point, of whatever kind and to whatever degree, whether consciously or not, resemble a “restless ocean.” Forced to produce a synthesis of two poles, essentially perceived as antagonistic, to find harmony and peace, their efforts become increasingly “frantic” as they face failure after failure. The History of Philosophy is such “restless ocean.” The waves become larger (more erudite) and more tempestuous (impacting society) as they go along, but always end up smashing themselves into nothingness upon the irresistible and towering rock-like coastline of God’s invincible reality. The outcome was a littered landscape at best. For one, there is not one philosopher who is not buried by his successor(s). For another, thinkers, such as, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche and their bi-polar warfare left an intolerable path of destruction behind, topped off by the well-documented Holocaust. Is per chance this “restlessness” also on open display in the History of Scholasticism? It may seem so! Icon after icon emerges, but no one ever produced a consensus. There always were, are, and continue to be loose and antagonistic ends, in heart, by mind and for life. Just bring Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham to mind, inclusive of their entourage. The basically littered landscape of Medieval Scholasticism had to be radically and thoroughly remedied by the Reformation. Both Luther and Calvin recognized that “eternity” was at stake. Hence the fire that burnt in their hearts to pursue a course that saw and fought “the litter.” For this they were willing, if not eager to give up their lives. In fact, many of their “offspring” did so in an Inquisition imposed martyrdom.

On the other hand, child-like submission to the complementarity of revealed truth makes all “contrasts” disappear like snow before the sun. It embraces complementarity by God’s *FIAT* in his “*BE-SO*” (One-ness *and* Three-ness), his “*DO-SO*” (Light as Wave *and* Particle; General Relativity *and* Quantum Physics) and his “*SAY-SO*” (The *Tri*-personality of the *One* God; Divine Sovereignty *and* Human Responsibility). These are not wearisome mountains to climb with a “restless (whether scholastic or anti-scholastic) mind.” To do so is to blow one’s mind. No, they are “Spiritual Basecamps” that provide the setting *and* the logistics to take courageous action. “Prevailing Harmony and Peace” is the “Catchword.” Cognitive, volitional, and emotional “rest” is the “Byword.” “Wagons, Ho” is the “Watchword!” But it takes a regenerate heart to “to see, to pursue, to embrace and to display,” that is “to get” all these “words,” which calls for two diagnostic realizations.

First, all efforts in whatever way to synthesize the two poles (1) are in search of intelligible and comprehensible “theoretical or practical” *unity*, whether in religion (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism), philosophy (Ancient and Modern), theology (philosophically infested theology, that is), theoretical physics (Hawking), in fact, in all areas and aspects of life, (2) inevitably and ironically end up in “rationalist universality” of the “oppressive” (if not the “tyrannical”) sort or in “irrationalist particularity” of the “obstinate (if not “licentious”) kind,⁵⁰ and (3) are essentially unregenerate in principle or in practice. To confine myself to

⁵⁰ This may stand in need of some additional explanation. Is. 59:13-16a indicates that apostasy from God invariably results in “suppression and rebellion,” with all the evil associated with both, such as systemic lying, injustice, and unrighteousness. This assesses in a few well-chosen words the totality of human history in all its phases, areas, and aspects. “Universality” will consistently be experienced as inimical to “freedom” and so as “tyrannical and oppressive” and consequently spawn “rebellion,” such as in the Robespierre “reign of terror” during the French Revolution, to mention only a single instance. “Particularity,” on the other hand, will be consistently be experienced as inimical to “law and order,” and consequently breed “control,” such as in the Napoleonic aftermath of the French Revolution. In a word, man’s apostasy from God cannot but upset the harmonious balance of “freedom and order.” Whenever and

snippets from Ancient and Modern Philosophy in explaining this, the starting point of a Plotinus in Ancient and a Heidegger in Modern Philosophy, both in the footsteps of their predecessors is the supposed “reality” of the Ultimate “One” of whatever sort and their aim is hungrily (!) to establish this once and for all.

It has escaped many, if not most experts or students of philosophy’s history, but should escape no one, that in all this they seek to move *beyond* the Trinitarian God of Scripture, simultaneously knowing and suppressing him in the process, whether consciously and intentionally or not. Candidly, there is *no concentration point above* him. God’s *Trinitarian Being*, in which “the One and the Many,” “Universality and Particularity,” are eternally, jointly and harmoniously, be it incomprehensibly, co-essential and co-functional, forever was, is and will be *ultimate*. Therefore, to search for a concentration point and originating source either beyond and above God, philosophically and theologically, or apart and in disregard of God, theoretically and practically, is sure indication of apostasy and rebellion, that is, of unregeneracy, whether in principle, in practice, or in both. That this “search” is the hallmark of Ancient and Modern Philosophy is incontestable. It is and should be equally incontestable that it never can and never will succeed. The ultimacy of the unbreakable joint polarity of the One and the Many in the Triune God entails that success is an impossibility. It also forbids every attempt to pursue it as an act of rebellion. No wonder that this synthesizing enterprise, for which a heart transplant in regeneration is the only antidote, has been earmarked and condemned as “heretical.” Hence, to repeat once more, the utter necessity to take Paul’s assessment of “futility and fraudulence” (Col. 2:8) to heart and to sound the alarm bells with him! To be bedfellows with those who put their eggs in the basket of the “One” of whatever sort is to share their fate. To be co-belligerents with them is to overlook or ignore their fate, and so fail as their “watchmen.” That this has dire consequences for everyone is spelled out in crystal clear language (Ezek. 33:1-16; Acts 20:26-27).

The second and corresponding, if not correlative realization is and should be the need for a *Gospel-Apologetics* that as such takes aims at the human heart. Since this is the originating “culprit” of all evil (Prov. 4:24; Mk. 7:21-23), any apologetics that fails or refuses to take this into account, in fact, to make this its priority focus is no and cannot be a biblical apologetics.

More about the content and contours of a *Gospel-apologetics* necessarily below. But for now, in God’s Grand Scheme all this does and must set the unencumbered stage to go and obey the all-overarching Marching Order of the Commander-in-Chief. “Pursue Souls, Baptism, and Holiness.” (1) “Go compassionately after sinners!” (2) “Populate a clearly identified and identifiable Church-under-the-Triune-God !!” (3) “Turn Believers into Battle-hardened Soldiers!!!” All this “To the Glory of the Triune God!” This is complementary “Rest in Motion!”⁵¹

wherever “upheaval” is in evidence in the society of mere man, whether in the political, economic, educational, etc., etc., arena, in the framework of the family, the state, the business, etc., etc., or in any other area of life, the diagnosis is invariably the same. It points to apostasy from God as the root cause. For a further analysis both of this “phenomenon” and of the biblical “cure,” see my SR, 17-33, and esp. 20; 87-121.

⁵¹ In this context I wish to call further attention to the monograph by T. William Ury, *Trinitarian Personhood* (TP). It is a thorough, near-exhaustive, and copiously annotated study of many, if not most of the icons (and semi-icons) in Church History who ventured to write about (1) the doctrine of the Trinitarian Being of God, (2) the ever re-emerging One and Many reality (131, 252, 255), as well as (3) the concept of “person” in reference to the Father, the Son, and

Spotlight V

Mastricht on Scholasticism and Natural Theology

The Church would do well to take a cue from Mastricht, I, 67, 69-71, 77, 81, 83, 85, 95, 133, 206. In short order, "As an example of excess, the Scholastics, according to their philosophical theology, loved the philosophical method of Aristotle -- whether it was his analytic or synthetic method -- to the point of distraction. ... The Reformed demand a method (to bring clarity and understanding to the topics taught and make them memorable), but not, precisely speaking, a philosophical one" (70). Mastricht espouses a method in which (1) "the heads of theology are positively proved from Scripture" and "fully explained" with "reasons" and all (69), and (2) "a method in which theory and practice always walk in step together." That is, they must be "perpetually joined together ... in such a way that theory precedes, and practice follows in every one of theology's articles (with reference to 1 Tim. 6:2c-3 and 2 Tim. 3:16) (67). Based on "Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15; Ps. 19:2-3; Acts 14:15; 17:27" (83), he makes room for a "natural theology" that under tutelage of and within the parameters of Scripture covers "bits and pieces of revealed theology," such as the observance of divine things in nature (Rom. 1:19-20) and the recognition of proper things that must be done in society (Rom. 2:14-15) (77, 206). The "bits and pieces" imply that this does this does not amount to a full-fledged edifice that "spontaneously arises from one's rational nature" (83). Furthermore, he sharply distinguishes this from "pagan theology." The former is "true," the latter is "false." It may come up with some right sounding "concepts," about God, divine worship, virtues, and human misery, but it is not going anywhere due to the "corrupt nature and blind reason" of its practitioners. Hence the true God, the true way of worship, the nature and purpose of virtue, and the origin of misery totally escapes them (81). All this carries over in his assessment of the use of philosophical considerations. He expresses his concern that in the use of the "natural method and arguments" of the philosophical type, although adopted as a "handmaiden, rather than a mistress" (2 Cor, 10:5-6) (78),

the Holy Spirit. He shows that all of them ascribe "mystery" to the "doctrine" (276), to the "reality" (255) and to the "concept" (271). But he also shows that the term "person" was not always as popular as it may seem. It appears to defy a compelling definition, even if there is consensus on certain components, is open to misuse by heretics, such as Sabellius (160), and is therefore at times met with some reservation (Augustine). It may even be essentially rejected for questionable reasons (Barth, Rahner). But even in that context (162), it is grudgingly (?) conceded regarding the "person" concept, as this is "sanctioned by the usage of more than fifteen hundred years," that "there is no other word which would be really better, more generally understandable and less exposed to misconceptions" (Rahner). Ury's conclusion is that "not one thinker" was able to put it all together. Candidly, this is a rather benevolent appraisal. He really should have stated that "no thinker" (period!) is ever able to do so. When we carefully scan his volume and try to come up with a bird's eye view, we look at a scenery that is dotted with lots of truly erudite "edifices." But none of them appears to be complete, and some of them are admittedly misconstrued. In short, while not quite a burnt-over territory, it resembles a maze without exit, or even a littered landscape. Most, if not all of them seem to be influenced by the prevailing philosophies of the day, such as, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Plotinianism, Neoplatonism, or a mixture of them and (therefore?) "nibble" at the essence of God, trying in numerous (innumerable?) ways to put a square peg (Three Persons) into a round hole (One Essence), or vice versa, a round peg (One Essence) into a square hole (Three Persons). Some even venture "forays" into this essence. But all of them come up short or run afoul, and are either at best partly applauded, or kept at arms' length, or even dumped by their contemporaries or successors. It is really a sight to behold! At any rate, it is remarkable (1) that not one of the "icons" embraces the incomprehensible complementarity of truth and takes this as his definitive point of departure in a "child-like" fashion, refusing "to embark upon the impossible," and (2) that the author does not suggest this as the necessary remedy, even where he had ample opportunity to do so in his conclusion (263-280). It is equally remarkable, if not more so, that he does not review and interact with the teachings of Reformers, such as, John Calvin, who wrote at length and in depth about the doctrine of the Trinity and the personhood of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May be their sobriety not to move speculatively beyond the content and dictates of Scripture had something to do with this. At any rate, it certainly leaves (much more than) a vacuum in an otherwise near-exhaustive volume that comes with a veritable wealth of material and insight! It could have shown the way out of the conundrums that were recorded but essentially left unsolved.

“Aristotle and others (all too easily and all too soon) began to be considered equal to the Scriptures, if not preferred over them.” This resulted in a “flight to philosophical subtleties and to the thickets of quite dreadful terms,” “augmented to an enormous extent in Aquinas in his defense of transubstantiation” (85). It appears that Aquinas’ questionable commitment to a philosophical content scholasticism paved the way for his embrace to the doctrine of transubstantiation. So, seemingly small, and at first unobtrusive, questionable beginnings may have perilous endings. At any rate, the bottom line is twofold. On the one hand, Mastricht resolutely shows the pagan theology of Socrates, Plato, Scipio, Aristides, or Seneca, the door (95). On the other hand, he recognizes as a child of his time that some of the Reformed theologians “neither entirely preserved nor entirely eliminated” philosophical scholasticism, but insisted that it “ought to be purged of its blemishes ... only then can it be preserved” (85). Mastricht himself holds that Scholastic Theology is useful in four areas. One must be familiar with it (1) to respond to the tricks and thickets of the papists, (2) to refute pagans and atheists, (3) to build up souls in revealed truth, and especially (4) to handle questions that border on theology and philosophy (86; see also 133). More about the latter below.

But for now, Mastricht would have been clearer if he had abandoned the concept of a “natural theology” altogether in the footsteps of John Calvin. The latter emphasizes that all of mankind inescapably *knows* God through created reality (Rom. 1:19-20) and is incurably *moral* through God’s imprint upon him (Rom. 2:14-15). But this does not and cannot translate into a *valuable* natural *theology* or a *universal* ethics due to mankind’s rebellious suppression of the truth that produces self-inflicted blindness and total corruption. See for this especially the extensive and excellent treatment of Calvin’s views by J. Douma, *Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin* (Hamilton, ON: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017), 249-260. This is in partial contrast to Muller, PRRD, I, 270ff, who tends to describe the extant biblical data pertaining to the *knowledge* of God as “natural theology,” and identify Calvin’s references to these data as well as his use of them either as “natural *theology*” or as paving the way to it. However, Douma’s assessment is echoed by the South African B. J. Vander Walt, *Die natuurlike teologie* (Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*) (Eng. Tr. *Natural Theology*), submitted as Doctor’s Thesis to the University of Potchefstroom, 1974/5. In Calvin “there is practically no space for natural theology due to the fall and the pervasiveness of sin. So, K. J. Popma, in *Philosophia Reformata* (Vol. 41, 1976), 73. But more about this questionable concept formation below. At any rate, it is interesting to note that Mastricht never appears to enlist so-called natural theology to assist him in the treatment of revealed theology. For him *Sola Scriptura* is his exclusive *principium cognoscendi*. Furthermore, when he refers to God’s Self-disclosure in created reality and in the human constitution (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15, etc.), he invariably points out that pagans ruin it from start to finish with their lamentable products. This is totally in line with Paul’s assessment of pagan thinking in Acts 17. Their suppression (Acts 17:29) of what they know (Acts 17:28) necessitates a call to repentance (Acts 17:30). Neither in Paul nor in Mastricht do we encounter even a trace of an articulated, polished, and promising “natural theology!” But to expand on this some more, Mastricht, TPT, I, 78, does give four reasons why “natural theology” would be useful. (1) With regard to God, it renders the impious without excuse (Rom. 1:20). (2) With regard to pagans and atheists, they are refuted by it (Acts 17:24-26; Ps. 8:2-3; Matt. 6:26). (3) With regard to revealed theology, we discover that it completely agrees with natural theology. (4) With regard to us who are chiefly rooted in revealed truth, we discern that nature itself applauds it. In all this he is a child of his time. Reformed orthodoxy of his day does insist on the propriety of a so-called biblical “natural theology” on the part of the regenerate, which it sharply distinguishes from a philosophically pagan and therefore false one (See for this also Turretin, IET, I, 44-47).

However, and for a starter, despite this it is a curious doctrine. Let me explain this after summarizing what the scholar who painted the landscape of Reformed orthodoxy in his monumental four volumes more exhaustively than anyone else (Muller, PRRD, I, II, III, IV). According to him (Muller, PRRD, I, 307-310), “The natural theology of the regenerate, because it is not saving can never become a locus of theological system.” “At very best it belongs to the church’s exercise of praise and to the ancillary tools utilized by theology in its arguments.” Hence it “stands at the edge of Christian thought.” It “exists as the result of Christian doctrine.” It is “included in the body of revealed doctrine.” It “rests entirely upon scriptural revelation for its primary content.” Frankly, these statements are self-defeating. If *revealed* truth is the content of *natural* theology, the latter simply evaporates as an independent entity. To continue, “Natural theology leaves human beings without excuse.” It “offers no positive content that can become of use to the regenerate.” It “*can* (italics, mine) gain some knowledge of what God *may* (italics, mine) be in his divine essence and attributes.” This last statement is awkward. The knowledge of God in his existence and in (at least some of) his attributes is an indisputable and undeniable universal fact. There is no need for this to be “gained” theologically. To conclude, it “has only a limited function.” “Natural revelation and the natural theology drawn from it cannot function as a foundation

on which to build supernatural revelation and supernatural theology.” So, this raises a pertinent question. What precisely is the function of this supposed “natural theology?”

By way of backdrop for an answer to this question, and to start with, “the materials of natural theology are precepts or principles engrafted into the nature of men, such as the existence of God, the nature of God and the worship of God.” Also, “ante-lapsarian natural theology is obscure and imperfect and after the fall (post-lapsarian) its principia are far more obscure, in fact, utterly corrupt and totally disordered” (Muller, PRRD, I, 288). Further, “16th and 17th century Reformed discussion of the use and nature of natural theology in the Christian context did not yield a single neatly defined paradigm for the construction of natural theology” (Muller, PRRD, I, 302). In a word, proponents of a so-called biblically endorsed natural theology rarely seem to go to any length to identify its precise content. However, one 17th century theologian (Alsted) appears to “develop a full-scale natural theology,” as he covers “the proofs of the existence of God, a doctrine of God as Being, a view of the essential attributes of God (but not of the divine affections, like love and mercy), a doctrine of God as Creator and Governor of the world (but not a fully developed locus of creation and providence, plus a discussion of angels as spiritual beings, man as microcosm, and physical being in its various properties. Although the discussion is enlightened throughout by biblical references, it remains non-soteriological in character, and observes the strict distinction between natural and supernatural revelation” (For all this, Muller, PRRD, I, 303-304). He is also quite clear in identifying the purpose and function of natural theology. “Designed to refute the Atheists, Epicureans and Sophists of his day” his volume is “an essay in *apologetics* (italics, mine)” (Muller, PRRD, I, 303). While endorsing this essentially apologetic function of natural theology at least one of his contemporaries (Cloppenburg) cautions him that the natural knowledge of God is “rough and unformed, if not “confused and indistinct,” and another one (Heidegger) adds that it “renders the contentious and obstreperous among the unregenerate without excuse before God,” and could be useful not only in “making those among the unregenerate who are in a searching mode to sense and so to discover God,” but also in “solidifying the regenerate in their reverence of God’s wisdom, power and goodness” (Muller, PRRD, I, 304-305).

Compare all this with Mastricht’s “four purposes,” and the apologetic function of natural theology appears to be, indeed, the main, if not overriding function of the natural theology of the regenerate. In a word, it seeks to respond to pagan, heterodox or heretical “natural theologies.” Since it is *non-soteriological*, I assume that it simply pits its content over against that of its “rivals” with the hope to arrive at some kind of mental agreement minimally regarding the existence and some of the attributes of God. Of course, as such it would not differ much from present day evidential apologetics in its objective, which is purposefully and insistently non-evangelistic.

Looking over this “landscape” as it is “painted,” it must awaken curiosity because we are not given a “neat and uniform picture.” In fact, the total picture seems confused, confusing, and therefore passing strange. To bring some order in the house let me start with John Calvin and his contemporaries. It is telling, and openly admitted, that even when they discussed the naturally available “*knowledge of God*,” neither Calvin nor his contemporaries ever constructed a natural *theology* (Muller, PRRD, I, 271; see also Douma, *Common Grace*, 238-243). Since they did not even “discuss the advisability or inadvisability of constructing one” (Muller, PRRD, I, 271), several things ought to be crystal clear. The notion of a “natural” theology for the regenerate was not in their purview or thinking on any front, frankly because there is no trace of it in Scripture. What the regenerate *do* have is a *revealed* theology about the natural *knowledge* of God. Further, since theirs was always a *soteriological* Gospel apologetics that targeted the heart unto repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:20), they never were in need of a sub-biblical, if not counter-biblical non-soteriological type of apologetics that merely aimed to arrive at a mental agreement, that is, an agreement on the part of a mind that is blind to start with. When and where precisely Reformed orthodoxy began to show an interest in, fell for the temptation to embark upon, a natural theology as the sole property of the regenerate may never be known. But it appears that it was Aquinas and his conceptual conviction that “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it” that is responsible for it (So Turretin, IET, I, 44; see also Muller, PRRD, I, 303). But when it entered the “encyclopedia” of theological studies” (Muller, PRRD, I, 272), confusion started to reign on several fronts. The first component was the interchangeable use of natural *revelation* and the natural *knowledge* of God that flows forth from it with natural *theology*. This is a *faux pas*! There is a decisive difference between the two. Natural revelation and natural knowledge are “states of affairs.” Natural theology is a *rational reflection* upon, if not response to these states of affairs. This mix-up is nearly commonplace in theological literature (Turretin, IET, I, 6-10). It is even foisted upon John Calvin and his contemporaries (See for this Muller, PRRD, I, 270-278). When they interpret and set forth the passages that mention these states of affairs it is *exegetical* theology. When they systematize them, it is *revealed* theology. When they hold out their content in whatever setting, it is either *proclamation* or *apologetic*

theology. In none of these three settings is this *natural* theology. So, even to hint that they open the door to natural theology is in error. Further, when systematic or apologetic theology reflect upon the states of affairs as presented in Scripture, it is also *revealed* theology. When they present it in whatever setting, it is the presentation of revealed theology. In a word, Paul diagnoses the “states of affairs,” condemns all “natural” interpretations as “empty deceit,” and responds to them as such. God’s people embrace Paul’s diagnosis by faith, rather than by reason. They consequently recognize the interpretation of all unbelievers as “vain deceit,” and apologetically respond to them in terms of Paul’s revealed theology. Since this is the admitted reality, the very idea of a “theology” developed by the regenerate, which is *based upon nature only*, apart from Scripture, is really a matter of mistaken identity. There simply is no such a theology. There never was, and never will be. This is both in principle and in practice admitted when its proponents openly and invariably state that they confront their “adversaries” with a “theology” that is made up of *biblical* data, such as Ps. 8:2-3; Mt. 6:26; Acts 17:24-26; Rom. 1:20, etc.!

So, detailing all this further, looking at it from the perspective of Scripture we may, if not must come to the following conclusions. First, that all mankind possesses the knowledge of God and operate with the distinction between good and evil is beyond question. The *cosmos* of God manifests the glory of God in terms of his existence and his attributes, which inevitably and indisputably leads to the universal “knowledge of God,” that is, knowledge on the part of all mankind (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-21). Further, the *image* of God, in which all mankind participates, has the indelible and equally indisputable imprint of the difference between good and evil stamped upon it (Rom. 2:14-15). In short, mankind is both incurably knowledgeable of God and incurably moral under God. As a result, apostate mankind is inescapably destined (fated, doomed) to “respond” to this, and so to produce its “natural theology” as well as its “natural ethics” of whatever sort and in whatever way in every phase and aspect of life. It may be elitist and sophisticated, philosophical and ideological, home-spun and primitive down to earth, or anything in between. It covers societal aspects, such as political, economic, scientific, educational, sexual, etc., as well as societal structures, such as marriage, the family, the business, the state, religious organizations, etc. All this is on open display throughout mankind’s history (Acts 17:21, 28; Rom. 2:14-15). However, to the extent its producers are apostate their products do and must suppress the knowledge of God and warp its moral compass. Therefore, they cannot but come up with “emptiness” across the board (Acts 14:15; Rom. 1:21; Col. 2:8), whether in religious activities (Acts 14:13), speculations (Rom. 1:21), or philosophical edifices (Col. 2:8). Even if they hold out the prospect of “heaven,” whether utopian on earth or beyond this in eternity! But they are always fraudulent (Col. 2:8) and face the unrelenting and eternal wrath of God. Hence, they always stand in need of repentance whenever, wherever, or however they enter history to capture the heart, mind, will, and emotions of people to their eternal destruction. By virtue and in the light of all this Scripture in its apologetic counter move never searches for, formulates, or utilizes an independent and independently produced so-called “natural theology” in response to the all too human apostate theological or ethical *products* it encounters. Instead it calls the *producers* to repentance through God’s revelation in Scripture (Acts 2:38) or his manifestation in nature (Acts 17:30). In all this it does not resort to a non-soteriological “theology” that aims at an agreement of the mind but exemplifies a Gospel apologetics that pierces the heart unto repentance (Acts 2). All in all, a “natural knowledge?” Yes, pervasively so. A “natural theology?” Yes, but only a false one, produced by unbelievers. No other such theology is even in existence, such as, a so-called pure one, developed by believers based on nature only. All proposals of that sort always derived its content from Scripture. Let me emphasize here what may not and should not go unnoticed. Even where apologetic push comes to shove in Reformed Orthodoxy, it may *claim* to do so by the so-called “natural theology of the regenerate,” but in reality it *invariably* uses Biblical truth to argue its case, that is, *revealed* theology in their confrontation of unbelief. Finally, neither is such non-existent theology apologetically necessary or appropriate on the part of believers. It is not necessary. They have enough “weapons” in the arsenal of revealed theology. Neither is it appropriate. A plea for a non-soteriological theology that addresses the mind flies in the face of Scripture, which insists in a soteriological Gospel Apologetics with all that this entails to reach the human heart.

Returning now for a moment to Maastricht’s four reasons in favor of natural theology, the way they are presented by the usually so careful theoretical-practical theologian is unclear if not confused, and questionable if not unacceptable. (1) According to the wording of Rom. 1:20, it is not natural theology but the universal knowledge of God that renders mankind without excuse. (2) Based on natural revelation and its subsequent suppression Paul does not refute pagans and atheists but calls to repentance. (3) and (4) It is not non-existent natural theology that sets the tone, a theology with which revealed theology “happens” to agree, and by which it is applauded. This turns the tables. It is the diagnostic revealed theology that sets the tone and consequently calls to repentance. Turning, finally, to Maastricht’s recommendation of Scholastic theology, he himself holds that Scholastic Theology is useful in four areas. One must be familiar with it (1) to respond to the tricks and

thickets of the papists, (2) to refute pagans and atheists, (3) to build up souls in revealed truth, and especially (4) to handle questions that border on theology and philosophy. (86; see also 133, 206). Frankly, (1) I do not see how “papist” tenets, such as the transubstantiation, could be offset by “natural theology.” Neither do I see (2) how pagans and atheists can have their eyes opened and make a repentant “turn around” apart from the regenerating Gospel (John 3:3, 5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Without further specifications (3) is not sufficiently transparent. But more about all this below.

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Following this foundational Introduction, we will first listen to some powerful pleas always to honor the complementarity of truth to avoid a dangerous derailment in thought and action and then inquire into some of the philosophical underpinnings that were all too often imported by the theological enterprise, which caused it to ignore these or similar pleas to its own detriment. Following this we will look at the shape of the so-called “Classic” defense of the doctrine of Divine Immutability, analyze and assess it, especially in the light of the philosophical theology of Thomas Aquinas, and then follow the same procedure in canvassing the views of several of its detractors who opt for Divine Mutability, whether in whole or in part. A comparison of the two views is topped off by a Provisional Conclusion, a twofold Pastoral Appeal, and a final Postscript.

II. Pleas to Avoid Pitfalls

Turning now to the issue of Divine Immutability, to settle this doctrine as well as its inseparable “ally,” Divine Simplicity, it is necessary to avoid both a Scylla and a Charybdis. The Scylla is *so to deify* God (and to “*de-humanize*” him for lack of a better term) to the *ultra*-point that an unbridgeable rift opens up between us and our Covenant God, that is, to imply that the language of Scripture is so technically anthropomorphic or anthropopathic that the meaning of the biblical text virtually begins to evaporate and loses its intended grip on its recipients, all possible protestations to the contrary. After all, it supposedly should be translated or at least be translatable into a higher language in order “really” to grasp its ungraspable essence. This “stratospheres” or etherealizes transcendence and downgrades or demotes immanence. The Charybdis is *so to humanize* God (and to “*un-deify*” him, once again for lack of a better term) to the *infra*-point that he virtually ends up being “created in the image of man,” that is, to imply that he is only “quantitatively,” rather than “qualitatively” different, also all protestations to the contrary in the present context. After all, so the argument goes, unless God is either temporal (and thereby mutable) by definition or assumes temporality following his *creatio ex nihilo*, he cannot really communicate with temporal beings. This, of course, either “domesticates” or tames transcendence or unduly “bumps up” or upgrades immanence.⁵²

Both the Scylla and the Charybdis are the offspring of a totally or partially “contrastive” ontology,⁵³ in which Divine Transcendence and Divine Immanence do not enjoy a harmonious co-existence, that is, mirror the unproblematic co-existence on display in Scripture. The Scylla runs the deadly risk to emphasize God’s transcendence at the expense of his immanence and so “essentially” to “out-source” any genuine knowledge of God. The

⁵² See for this also Stephen Dumont, “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus,” in RHMP, 298ff, esp. 302-303. Henry of Ghent modified the common notion of “analogy.” The two distinct (equivocal) concepts of being proper to God and the creatures were not only united through “attribution” (analogy), but also through “con-fusion” in as much the concept of being applied to both could be conceived as sufficiently indeterminate and indistinct so as to *appear* univocal. This admitted “quagmire” was supposedly “the cognitive bridge” that kept transcendence and immanence apart and combined them at the same time. This is quite clearly an attempt to overlook or ignore the incomprehensible nature of the complementarity of truth. That it ended up as a failed attempt to make it “somehow” intelligible is now generally acknowledged. At any rate, it shows the murky nature of the concept of analogy. It is a band-aid that does not and cannot stop the bleeding! The questionable nature of this concept was apparently recognized by Turretin as well. “Strictly speaking attributes are predicated of the divine nature neither univocally, analogically, or equivocally, but rather ‘denominatively.’” That is, attributes should be treated just like the “names” of God, “not to be understood in any definable proportion to or in an absolutely equivocal disjunction with the creaturely attributes.” Apparently to be taken at face value! See for this Muller, PRRD, III, 226 as well as Turretin, IET, I, v.3. More details about this later as well. For Henry of Ghent’s concept of “con-fusion,” see also Stephen F. Brown, “The Patristic Background,” in CPMA, 28, as well as my further analysis below.

⁵³ This graphic terminology is proposed by Kathryn Tanner. To her a “non-contrastive” ontology honors both full Divine transcendence and full Divine immanence equally and happily. God and his creation are not woven of one cloth, destroying his transcendence. Neither is creation competitive with God, compromising his immanence. This comes quite close to a plea to honor the complementarity of truth. See as well for this “proposal,” Long, PSTG, 366-369.

Charybdis falls victim to the equally deadly emphasis upon God's immanence at the expense of his transcendence and so "essentially" to lose sight of his incomprehensibility. In either instance the Scriptures are violated, the rightful worship of God is sidestepped, and obedience is downgraded. As a result, all too often Church splits, based on all too human "constructs of thought," either did happen, do happen, or are waiting to happen. All this explains why theo-ontology is always hurtful and potentially self-destructive.⁵⁴

The Scylla is identified a. o. by two authors. So is the Charybdis. All four will now pass in review.

The Scylla is aptly described by Albert Martin, *Preaching in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 46-47, in the context of Ephesians 4:30, "Although the theologians and exegetes have gone all 'round the proverbial mulberry bush (emphasis, mine) talking about the limitations that we must place on anthropopathisms (attributing human capacities and emotions to the Deity), how are we to understand this imperative (not to grieve the Holy Spirit)? Well, when God says, 'Don't grieve the Holy Spirit,' He obviously means that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit! He is a person who in his personhood reacts to certain situations with a disposition that has *kinship* (emphasis, mine) with what we experience as the emotion and disposition of grief. With all the due qualifications demanded by the Creator-creature distinction (sic!), if God meant to convey that he has no relationship to our felt experience of grief, why did he use this particular word? He did not put it there so that it should be bled of all its significance, thereby projecting the image of God who is beyond and outside of any feeling akin to our grief.⁵⁵ No, he tells us that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit for the simple reason that a grieved Spirit becomes an enraged and withdrawn Spirit."

Austin Phelps, *The Still Hour* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 37-40, weighs in on this as well, "Right in the heart of God's government prayer is lodged as a power ... It is, and God has *purposed* that it should be, a link of connection between human mind and Divine mind by which through his infinite condescension, we may actually move his will. It is, and God has *decreed* that it should be, a *power* in the universe as distinct, as real, as natural, and as uniform, as the power of gravitation, of light, or of electricity ... It is that a man should expect to achieve something by praying as it is that he should expect to achieve something by a telescope, or the mariner's compass, or the electric telegraph. The Scriptures make it a reality, and not a reverie. They do not bury it in the notion of a poetic or philosophical contemplation of God ... They have not concealed the fact of prayer behind the mystery of prayer. The scriptural utterances on the subject of prayer admit of no such reduction of tone and confusion of sense as men often put forth. Up, on the level of inspired thought, *prayer* is PRAYER – a distinct, unique, elemental power in the spiritual universe, as pervasive and as constant as the great occult powers of Nature. The want of trust in this scriptural ideal of prayer, often neutralizes it, even in the experience of the Christian ... Despair of an object is speechless. So, if you wish to enjoy prayer you must first form to

⁵⁴ See for this also, Ury, TP, 26, "An overemphasis upon transcendence or immanence destroys the Christian gospel." We are clearly dealing with life and death issues!

⁵⁵ We encounter the same sentiment in an remarkably incisive statement by J. Kamphuis, *Katholieke Vastheid* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1955), 87, "Scripture speaks of the affliction of the Lord (Is. 63:9), of the vexation (Is. 63:10) and the grief of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Woe the man, who casually and arrogantly shrugs his shoulders when he hears these awesome words of Scripture and dismisses them out of hand, looking down at them from the "Mt. Everest" of his philosophical god-idea, and ambles routinely down his usual path with the glib explanation that this is an anthropomorphism."

yourself such a theory of prayer – or if you do not consciously form it, you must have it, - and then you must cherish such trust in it, as a reality, that you shall feel the force of an object in prayer. No mind can feel that it has an object in praying except in such degree that it appreciates the scriptural view of prayer as a genuine thing ... If we suffer our faith to drop down from the lofty conception of prayer *as having a lodgment in the very counsels of God by which the universe is swayed* (italics and emphasis, mine) the plain practicalness of prayer as the Scriptures teach it, and as the prophets and apostles and our Lord himself performed it, drops proportionally, and in that proportion our motive to prayer dwindles. Of necessity, then, our devotions become spiritless. Our supplications cannot go ‘in a right line to God.’ They become circuitous, timid, heartless. They may so degenerate as to be offensive, ‘like the reekings (sic!) of the Dead Sea.’”⁵⁶ This is strong language. The author clearly regards the issue that he addresses of the highest significance.

In both quotations it is hardly possible to miss the resolve simultaneously and without reservation to hold on *both* to the plain language of Scripture *as unambiguously and unassailably* communicating what it clearly says *and* to the uncompromised glory of God *as being unmistakably and irrefutably God*. Scripture does not evaporate by questioning the precise and basically elusive meaning of the text and God is not humanized by entombing him in all too human categories. The *heartfelt* embrace of the complementarity of truth is *heartwarming*. In both instances we are given a summons to and do experience a desire properly to worship and obediently to take the necessary action! Not a theo-ontological trace of the substantive or methodological *hubris* of the human mind that defiantly seeks to make the essence of the polarity in this complementarity transparent and in doing so tends to obscure, if not practically obviate worshipful obedience and obedient worship. To be even more precise, what is and must be recognized as contradictory to the human mind is embraced as harmonious truth by the regenerate heart that in the process reaps the grace-fruit of cognitive, volitional as well as emotional rest. In all this the Christian comes face to face with what is and must be “the scandal of truth” to the human mind. Every effort to explain it is theo-ontology with a vengeance and thereby seeks to remove “the scandal,” whether explicitly defined as such or not. To seek this removal to whatever extent or degree, whether consciously and intentionally or not, may well be the core of brazen hubris and the height of defiant arrogance. To what other conclusion should we come, when we see the finite mind going to whatever length to “pry” into “the secrets” of God?

The Charybdis comes to expression in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), Vol. I and II. His bottom line is that he wishes to derive his total Systematic Theology from Holy Writ as his ultimate source and point of reference, and furthermore that he would pursue his goal to produce such Theology as a *project of faith* in radical surrender to Scripture, in total embrace of it, and in self-abandonment to it.⁵⁷ He goes to great length to emphasize the “complete adequacy” of the language, the authority, the necessity, the clarity and the sufficiency of Scripture to make its message crystal clear and to accomplish the purpose for which it is given.⁵⁸ He enlarges on this as follows, “As God

⁵⁶ When folks ever tell us that “prayer can ‘change’ the course of history, that is, the way it appears to be heading, or even the way God says it is heading,” they are right on the money, if 2 Ki. 20:1-6 is any indication. Does this contrast with God’s immutable plan? Of course not! Can we plumb this with our finite mind? Never! Should we ever try? May God forbid! Does this energize us to storm the gate of heaven to be co-laborers of God in advancing the Kingdom? By all means! Should it energize us to do so. Absolutely! All this is essentially what Phelps is telling us!

⁵⁷ Bavinck, RD, I, 78, 83, 86-89, 93.

⁵⁸ Bavinck, RD, I, 377-494, especially, 378, 382, 444, 472, and RD, II, 110.

reveals himself (in Scripture), so he is ... becomes knowable to us ... and brings to our mind the fullness of his being.”⁵⁹ The latter is a remarkable as well as amazing statement in its all-encompassing scope. No hesitation about the total trustworthiness of Holy Writ and the unquestioned knowability of our God. This emphasis paves the way to the full embrace of the complementary truth of the radical simultaneity of God’s total, unimpeded and interactive covenantal immanence as well as his total, undiminished and unalterable essential Transcendence. This congruity ever did, ever does, and ever will challenge the finite mind, whether apostate or not. But it does come to total adoring rest in the regenerate heart that extends itself to the total image of God, the internal mental, volitional and emotional functions, its moral obedience, its social interaction, its creative imagination, its words and its deeds.

At any rate, with all this as backdrop Bavinck addressed the issue of Divine Immutability in two contexts, in the context of all the Divine perfections and in the context of the Trinitarian Being of God. In the first context he states, “God’s incomprehensible greatness, and, by implication, the glory of the Christian confession is precisely that God, though immutable in himself, can call mutable creatures into being. Though eternal in himself, God can nevertheless enter time, and though immeasurable in himself, he can fill every cubic inch of space with his presence. In other words, though he himself is absolute being, God can give to transient beings a distinct existence of their own. In God’s eternity there exists not a moment of time; in his immensity there is not a speck of space, in his being there is no sign of becoming. Conversely, it is God who posits the creature, eternity which posits time, immensity which posits space, being which posits becoming, immutability which posits change. There is nothing intermediate between these two classes of categories: a deep chasm separates God’s being from that of all creatures.”⁶⁰ While the essential nature of time, by definition, encompasses a succession of moments and (as such) is the mode of existence that is characteristic of all created and finite beings, God’s eternity is devoid of succession. However, “God’s eternity should not for that reason be conceived as an eternally static, immobile moment of time ... God’s eternity does not stand, abstract and transcendent above time but is present and immanent in every moment of time. There is indeed an essential difference between eternity and time, but there is also a *kinship* (emphasis, mine) between them so that the former can indwell and work in the latter ... God pervades time and every moment of time with his eternity ... But this fact does not make him temporal, that is subject to time, measure, or number. He remains eternal and inhabits eternity but uses time with a view of making his eternal thought and perfections manifest.” He makes time subservient to eternity and thus proves himself to be the King of the Ages (1 Tim. 1:17).⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bavinck, RD, II, 111.

⁶⁰ Bavinck, RD, II, 158-159. See also Turretin, IET, I, 202-204.

⁶¹ Bavinck, RD, II, 162-164. For the “kinship” phraseology, which in a telling way honors both and simultaneously Divine transcendence and Divine immanence also see, II, 128, “We must remember that God can act in so many different qualities and be called by so many different names, because there is a kinship between him and his creatures. If this kinship did not exist, all the names would be untrue ... The names do not merely denote God as the cause of things (*versus* Aristotle and Aquinas?!), but furnish, however feebly and inadequately, some inkling of the divine essence. So, referring to God by all these names, we indeed speak imperfectly, in finite terms, in limited human ways, yet not falsely. For through in God knowing and willing, righteousness and grace always constitute the one full being, yet in those many perfections God displays for our eyes that one rich being consecutively and in juxtaposition. Although it is always the same being that confronts us in these many names each name by itself gives us a succinct

In the Trinity context he adds, “All the attributes (including Divine immutability) only come alive and become real as the result of the Trinity. Apart from it, they are mere names, only sounds, empty terms! As attributes of the Triune God they come alive both to our mind and our heart (!). Only by the Trinity do we begin to understand that God as he is in himself, the independent, eternal, omniscient and all benevolent One, love, holiness and glory.”⁶² He applauds Athanasius who in the defense of the Trinity as “the heart and center of Christianity ... completely avoids the philosophical intermingling” with a (theo-)ontology (addition and italics, mine).⁶³ In fact, in his clearly antithetical encounter with this “intermingling” he concludes that “those who deny the Trinity reduce God to a lifeless principle.”⁶⁴ This comes down to a hearty “good-bye” to Aristotle and his philosophical as well as his theological ilk.

Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019) weigh in on all this as well.⁶⁵ They make a thorough and frankly admirable presentation of the various biblical data pertaining to God’s immutability and several related perfections, such as his simplicity, incomprehensibility and impassibility. The length of this presentation allows us to touch upon some of the pertinent highlights only. I start with covering the quintessence of their view and continue with some details to gain additional depth perspective.

To begin with the quintessence, it is found in the ever-repeated insistence on honoring the mystery⁶⁶ of the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God⁶⁷ that cannot be grasped by the “tiny” human mind which should never seek to “judge God’s Word, as if the infinite God is subject to our (theo-ontological) analysis.”⁶⁸ Under the umbrella of Romans 11:33, which declares God’s judgments to be “unsearchable” and with reference to H. Bavinck’s designation of “mystery as the lifeblood of theology,” they seek to stick meticulously to what is revealed in Scripture by doing full justice to both complementary poles. “We cannot penetrate the infinite depths of his glory or fully trace out his ways (Rom. 11:33). However, the Bible makes statements that do more than describe what God does; they reveal who he is: ‘God is a Spirit’ (John 4:24); ‘God is light’ (1 John 1:5); ‘God is love’

statement of what that being truly is in its fullness. In God holiness and mercy may be the same in essence, yet our understanding of these two attributes formed from God’s self-revelation differs. There is no name capable of expressing God’s being with full adequacy. Given that reality, many names serve to give us an impression of his transcending grandeur.” The utter care and respectful sobriety in which Bavinck delineates the complementarity of truth, without using this terminology, is remarkable. Regarding kinship, it is said that Augustine “plumbs” the ontological and operational “architectonic structure” of man ... “to open the believer to actual participation in the life of the Trinity of which it is the created image.” In fact, for him “the image of God in itself is so powerful that it is able to cleave to him whose image it is.” See for this Ury, TP, 155.

⁶² Bavinck, RD, II, 331.

⁶³ Bavinck, RD, II, 285.

⁶⁴ Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos*, as quoted in Kamphuis, 200, also argues for the intimate connection of the doctrine of the Trinity and that of the immutability of God.

⁶⁵ Beeke-Smalley, RST, I, 534-539, 624-645, 685-716, 829-850, 855-873. From here on quoted as Beeke, RST, I.

⁶⁶ Beeke, RST, I, 865.

⁶⁷ Beeke, RST, I, 597, 640, 680-682, 684, 692, 727-728, 840, 869.

⁶⁸ Beeke, I, 684.

(4:8); and so on.⁶⁹ Since these are words from God, we must believe them to be meaningful and true.”⁷⁰

All this is the reason why they can quote R. C. Sproul with approval, when he makes the following statement regarding God’s impassibility, “We must not let a speculative form of impassibility strip God of his personal attributes, especially his attribute of love ... If he has no capacity for affection, he has no capacity for love.” At the same time, they continue, “we must not let the finite qualities of our human affections be attributed to God in a manner that strips him of his majesty ... God relates to this world in love and mercy, wrath and displeasure, and holy jealousy for the glory of his name (Ex. 34:6-7, 14), but his affections manifest at various points of time, his eternal, immutable will, not changes in God himself.”⁷¹

So, on the one hand, “God is and remains immutably infinite and incomprehensible” ... “possessing an unlimited fullness of goodness and glory, he can neither decrease nor increase.”⁷² God’s immutability is part of his unique glory.⁷³ This does not translate into a “lifeless, static, impersonal principle,”⁷⁴ a “metaphysical iceberg, frozen without affection,”⁷⁵ a “stagnant ocean.” No, the Bible describes him “as the living, personal and active God ... He dwells (both) in immutable activity and dynamic rest.”⁷⁶ On the other hand, “although God is immutable in himself, he is immanently near to his creatures in all their changes, guiding them personally according to his unchanging will (Ps. 139:7-10, 16-18).”⁷⁷ “The great difficulty arises for us if we try to press into God’s inner life ... and do not revere his incomprehensibility ... We cannot fully understand the inward personal life of God in his essence. We should glorify his holy name. To comprehend the inner life of God would require us to be God. Our analogical knowledge of God as his images is rich and beautiful, but as limited as our little minds. It is knowledge of the Creator, adapted to the needs of created or creaturely minds. Sound theology requires delicate balance ... Herman Bavinck said: ‘Without losing himself, God can give himself, and while absolutely maintaining his immutability, he can enter into an infinite number of relations with his creatures.’” As to God’s affections, “we come to a point where we must humble ourselves, trust his Word and adore his glory as the infinite, eternal, unchangeable, loving and righteous Lord ... Our highest theology is the learning of children ... It is good to be a child before God (Ps. 131).”⁷⁸ Especially, the “call,” if not “summons” to be child-like in the face of what is essentially the mysterious “complementarity of truth” is noteworthy! More about this extensively below. But for now, one looks in vain for such “call” in Medieval or Reformed scholasticism. We will have to determine how significant this is. In short, we will have to settle whether this shows an indispensable regrettably “missing link” that has tragic consequences, or whether

⁶⁹ See for the emphasis of these biblical truths in Reformed orthodoxy also, Muller, PRRD, III, 276.

⁷⁰ Beeke, RST, I, 534-535; Note well, the authors insist that Scriptural terms are “meaningful and true” because they are the very words of God! They do not tell us that Biblical language, although only analogical in nature, is both basically to stop the bleeding caused by the designation of “merely analogical,” that is, essentially “defective” and “false,” be it to a degree! See for this also, Muller, PRRD, III, 310-322, 359-362.

⁷¹ Beeke, RST, I, 872-873.

⁷² Beeke, RST, I, 690.

⁷³ Beeke, RST, I, 699.

⁷⁴ Beeke, RST, I, 683.

⁷⁵ Beeke, RST, I, 848.

⁷⁶ Beeke, RST, I, 691.

⁷⁷ Beeke, RST, I, 706.

⁷⁸ Beeke, RST, I, 872-873.

the failure (or refusal) to issue such “call” simply can be ignored, concluding that “no consequent harm has been done!”

Clearly, the hallmark of both Bavinck and Beeke is the simultaneous humble and worshipful reverence of the patently incomprehensible and unsearchable transcendence of God and the humble and worshipful gratitude for the truly and adequately knowable and experienced immanence of God, as these are *both* revealed in our infallible and inerrant Scripture.

To continue with some details for additional depth perspective, all this is in evidence throughout Beeke-Smalley’s Systematic Theology section that deals with the affections of God, not only of the so-called “positive” affections, such as God’s love, etc., but also of the so-called negative ones, such as, God’s anger.⁷⁹ This section stays fully in the tradition of Ecclesiastical orthodoxy in general and of Reformed orthodoxy in particular, both of which always have affirmed the existence of Divine affections, even if they never went off the deep end by questioning or nixing God’s transcendence in the process.⁸⁰

On the one hand, God’s affections cannot be reduced to an “exercise of the will of God.”⁸¹ Neither are they a mere “description of the actions of God.”⁸² Nor are they simply a matter of “metaphorical language.”⁸³ All “claims” of this sort are ultimately designed to “get rid” of “Divine affections”⁸⁴ as essentially incompatible with God’s Impassibility, Immutability, and sooner or later with his Simplicity and even his Aseity.⁸⁵ As such, they virtually shrivel, dry up, and vanish. Frankly, it is impossible to conclude that Scripture would allow this. Too often it refers to Divine affections, their range, and their intensity to tolerate this. Of course, unless one starts with the basic assumption that the language of Scripture is so “naïve” that it does and must stand corrected! Or worse, since Scripture is God-breathed, God’s “breath” needs to be sanitized, cleaned up by the “Listerine” of the philosophical theo-ontological enterprise. On the other hand, they cannot undo the Impassibility of God, as if he could be distressed and be made to refocus by external forces. Neither can they undo his Immutability, as if he could be affected and be made to adjust by external circumstances. All this has the earmarks of the horns of a dilemma. It seems that they must tone down each other, one way or another, if not cancel each other out. So, as to end up with ultimately one of the two horns, in total or partial charge! This “state of affairs” is on unquestionable display in Church history. Supposedly the two horns simply cannot have a right to exist simultaneously, either in an equal fashion or at all!

Beeke and Smalley simply do not buy this and embrace (feel forced to embrace?) both, clearly based on what they believe to be the unquestionable data of Scripture, be it that they seem to treat this as “walking a tightrope” or “committing a balancing act.”⁸⁶ But there is

⁷⁹ Beeke, RST, I, 829-875.

⁸⁰ Beeke, RST, I, 830-832, 835-837, 839, 842, 862, with a further reference to Muller, PRRD, III, 33, who asserts the very same.

⁸¹ Beeke, RST, I, 867.

⁸² Beeke, RST, I, 863; see also Baines, CIG, 130, 134, 158, 165-166, 175; Wolterstorff, IG, 234, 236.

⁸³ Beeke, RST, I, 836; see also Baines, CIG, 172; Wolterstorff, IG, 236.

⁸⁴ Beeke, RST, I, 842; see also Wolterstorff, IG, 219.

⁸⁵ Wolterstorff, IG, 153-156, 219-220, 238, does, indeed, come to the conclusion that his “immanent God,” a God who redeems, and in doing so interacts as well as suffers in the process, the God which he insists is the “biblical” one, cannot possibly be impassible or immutable. With this the underlying concepts of his “simplicity” and even his “aseity” must go by the board as well.

⁸⁶ Beeke, RST, I, 855, 865.

more to this well! The pivotal bottom line is their emphasis upon the need to be child-like in the face of God's Self-disclosure in Holy Writ.⁸⁷ As a consequence, they admirably give full weight to the "wide range" as well as the "infinite intensity" of all the affections of God that they encounter in Scripture, such as, God's mercy,⁸⁸ patience,⁸⁹ love,⁹⁰ jealousy,⁹¹ joy,⁹² affections in general,⁹³ wrath,⁹⁴ grief,⁹⁵ and compassion.⁹⁶ Any other type of "attitude" is implicitly presented as an enticement to enter dark and dead-end theological alleys.

Frankly, for both Bavinck and Beeke-Smalley God's self-revelation in Scripture is and remains the bottom line and both issue stern warnings, whether implicit or explicit, against the danger, if not tendency to exceed the limitations of our finite, in fact, "limited" and "tiny" minds," and to venture in unsearchable and forbidden territory. One can be certain that both worship and obedience will go by the board proportionate to the breadth, height, depth, and length of our hazardous, and potentially lethal theo-ontological speculations. All in all, in neither Bavinck or Beeke-Smalley, thus far,⁹⁷ there is the slightest theo-ontological trace, such as in evidence in an all too human absolutistic emphasis upon the Creator-creature distinction, that would cast only the least shadow upon the finality of "what is written" in its meaning, veracity, its reliability, its sufficiency, and its trustworthiness. In short, for both Bavinck and Beeke-Smalley, although for the latter more clearly, the acknowledged "scandal of truth" to the human mind evaporates once it is lodged in the *child-like* regenerate heart.⁹⁸ Let it be emphasized once more. The moment this "scandal" disquiets, discomforts or unsettles the mind, which results in one or more attempts to attain or regain an equilibrium by smoothing it out or make it palatable, theo-ontology shows its impure, if not its corrupt heart and raises its ugly head, whether substantially in the unregenerate or methodologically in the regenerate. At that same moment, the hunt for "secret" essence threatens, if not eclipses the hunger for the "openly" mandated ethics, and God's "wonderful" and "admirable" truth jeopardizes, if not loses its intended impact of heartfelt obedience in whatever way, to whatever degree and to whatever extent.

Once again, that their (instinctive?) heart's surrender to the complementarity of truth is the foundational backdrop for both Bavinck and Beeke-Smalley, and thereby for all four authors mentioned in this Section, goes hardly without saying, even if this is not explicitly verbalized. However, this poses an inevitable question. Is "complementarity of truth" a sufficient, in fact, a compelling biblical rationale for staking out one's position? If so, it would supply a proper, if not indisputable foundation for a critical appraisal of the various theo-

⁸⁷ Beeke, RST, I, 843.

⁸⁸ Beeke, RST, I, 784-786.

⁸⁹ Beeke, RST, I, 787-788.

⁹⁰ Beeke, RST, I, 788-802.

⁹¹ Beeke, RST, I, 830-832.

⁹² Beeke, RST, I, 844-846.

⁹³ Beeke, RST, I, 849-850.

⁹⁴ Beeke, RST, I, 852-854.

⁹⁵ Beeke, RST, I, 854-855.

⁹⁶ Beeke, RST, I, 861-862, 869-871.

⁹⁷ Below we touch upon some inconsistencies on the part of both Bavinck and Beeke. But these resemble clearly unintentional and definitely unconscious slips which do not reflect the main thrust of their thinking and can be easily avoided without damaging their essential and overriding tenor!

⁹⁸ For *praying* in a child-like manner, I recommend Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), especially, 17-60, in addition to the earlier volumes of Austin Phelps, *The Still Hour* (London: Counted Faithful, 2017), and Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Gainesville, FL: Brios, 1999).

ontological positions that overlook, ignore, or deviate from it. Any such position will to bridge the unbridgeable gap between Divine Transcendence and Immanence, or at least describe the location and contours of the “bridge.” The “end product” is threefold. Some remove Transcendence from sight altogether and insist on total “equivocity.” No possible bridge! Others have immanence swallow up transcendence and insist on total univocity. No need for a bridge. Again, others take a middle position. Transcendence and immanence must be within eye and earshot. Equivocity is out. So is univocity. The only thing left is analogicity. Commitment to the biblical complementarity of truth transcends the equivocity-analogicity-univocity dilemma altogether.

Here our depth-perspective enters the picture, Beeke-Smalley retain this triad “theoretically.” “Our talk about God is neither univocal (meaning the same for him as it does for us) nor equivocal (meaning something completely different). It is analogical language (meaning something similar but not identical).”⁹⁹ Hence we cannot determine with “an unqualified yes or no,” whether God has affections. But the same would (does!) apply to God’s thoughts. There are points of resemblance between God’s emotions and God’s thoughts and ours, because we are “theo-morph.” But at the same time, they transcend ours. God has an “omniscient mind that grasps all truths in a single eternal act” and “impassible emotions.” However, we “dare not deny” either truth, lest we “suggest that he is both a mindless force” and “a metaphysical iceberg.”¹⁰⁰

At this point, however, we encounter an anomaly (?) in the thinking of Beeke-Smalley! On the one hand, we are told that “all our talk about God must involve a yes and a no while carefully avoiding logical contradictions that would make theology nonsense and God untrue.”¹⁰¹ Beeke-Smalley return to this yes/no dilemma continuously. Apparently, it “haunts (?)” them, as it should.¹⁰² To have a yes/no “Sword of Damocles” hovering over every proposition is not a pleasant experience. On the other hand, however, when they exegetically “sermonize” about God’s affections the yes/no conundrum is relegated to the background, if not vanishes from sight altogether. They expound Scripture at face value, in a child-of-God-like fashion. The theoretical theo-ontological tightrope and balancing act¹⁰³ are gone! In the practical biblical exposition, it is yes/yes all the way. Yes: Divine affections are extolled in the fulness of Biblical truth, truly festal food for the soul! Yes: Divine Transcendence in his Immutability and Impassibility in the fulness of Biblical truth are equally extolled in an equally nourishing way. Incomprehensibility? Of course! But let the impossibility to determine the precise interrelationship between the two “Yes’s” not interfere with the possibility and necessity to exposit God’s perfect Word in both frameworks grammatico-historically to his glory and man’s wellbeing.

In a word, theoretically the triad of equivocity-analogicity-univocity with all that this entails hovers above the Systematic Theology of Beeke-Smalley. But in their Systematic Theologizing the complementarity of truth is victorious. I can only hope and pray that this child-like “David” will (always) slay the theo-ontological “Goliaths” who invariably in one way or another put a question mark behind the language of *Holy Writ*. A commitment to these historical “Goliaths” can only have deleterious effects, jeopardizing the fresh and

Commented [HK3]: ,

⁹⁹ Beeke, RST, I, 833.

¹⁰⁰ Beeke, RST, I, 833, 848.

¹⁰¹ Beeke, RST, I, 833.

¹⁰² Beeke, RST, I, 842-844, 846-848, 855-862-869, 871-873.

¹⁰³ Beeke, RST, I, 865.

refreshing Biblical Worship of God and threatening the souls of man, if the course of Church History is any indication!

The final Section of this Volume is set apart to spell out how the Word of God comes into its awesome own in the practical details of its all-encompassing truth when “David” wins out and a heartfelt commitment to the incomprehensible complementarity of God’s truth is or becomes the indisputable point of departure in one’s theological enterprise.¹⁰⁴ It will perennially and across the board refuse to look or to make forays into “the secret essence” of God (Deut. 29:29a) but devote all its energy and time in the heartfelt and incessant pursuit of “the revealed ethics” of God (Deut. 29:29b). All its theologizing will take (all possible and necessary) pains to stay away from the former and to be high-octane fuel for the latter.

The Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered Apostles blazed the Christ-mandated Trail. Armed with the New Covenant Gospel (Acts 2:38), they spent time in the “public square” and went from “house to house,” making disciples (Acts 4:31; 5:20, 25, 42), baptized them (Acts 2:41) and without interruption taught them to observe whatever God commanded (Acts 6:4). Paul was not far behind (Acts 20:21; 1 Cor. 9:16-18; 10:31; 15:1 / 1 Cor. 1:16 / Acts 11:26; 20:20). So, why would we (anybody) lag? Especially, since we are not only told to follow suit (1 Cor. 11:1), but also have spontaneous Spirit-filled models to that effect (Acts 11:19-21; 1 Thess. 1:5-8). As we shall see, there is no reason to believe why a true grasp and heartfelt embrace of both the Immutability and Simplicity of God would not help yield the same result! Whether on the part of proponents or opponents, any Immutability and Simplicity theology should for a minimum have the pursuit of Divine Ethics, epitomized in Christ’s Triple Command, as its practical objective. Somewhat ironically, according to John 7:17 an intense uncompromised focus (*orthopathos*) to do his will (*orthopraxis*) should go a long way to have one arrive at and settle on “the right doctrine” (*orthodoxy*), also the one pertaining to the *Immutabilitas* and *Simplicitas Dei*. At any rate, in all this the need for self-examination is there whenever and wherever theologizing occurs. The sterile “Teapot” may never rule the roost. This is the case when “formulators of the faith” are content with delivering “mere theology.” The brew in the “Teapot” may be excellent. But if it is not poured out, what good does it do? It may well turn “stale.” Further, even if “it is it is ‘calm’ (on the Western Front), it could have the stamp of DOA on it. This is also the case when “defenders of the faith” put up a not so ‘quiet’ and utterly proper “verbal tempest” that remains

¹⁰⁴ More than a glimpse of this is evident in Beeke, RST, I, 846-849. A comparison of John Murray and John Owen in their addressing the issue of God’s affections seems to force the conclusion upon a careful student that they contradict each other. To avoid a “bland” understanding of God’s wrath Murray forcefully emphasizes that it should not be equated with its effects. It spells the movement of a holy revulsion against sin (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Rom. 1:35). To avoid the idea that the reference to God’s wrath indicates an emotional disturbance, Owen with equal force insists that it does denote “the effects of anger.” Taking careful account of the context in which both authors wrote, Beeke-Smalley correctly object to the “contradiction” charge. But they could have put up a stronger argument. Both Murray and Owen covered only one “pole” of the complementarity of Biblical truth. God’s wrath signifies something (Murray). But it does not impinge upon God’s immutability (Owen). Their statements may seem contradictory to the human mind. But both, while they admittedly could have stood a more full-orbed and intelligible precision, mirror the simultaneous truth of Scripture that fits snugly in the regenerate heart! To emphasize once more, whenever Systematic Theology encounters complementarity of truth, it has the opportunity, the privilege as well as the mandate to launch into a *Gospel*-apologetics, and make it crystal clear that only a regenerate heart can have perfect cognitive, volitional, and emotional peace with God’s incomprehensible truth! Such an opportunity, of which there are many in Scripture, should not be allowed to go to waste! On this count both Murray and Owen come up short. The otherwise correct explanatory “defense” of Beeke-Smalley could have alerted us to this.

“theoretical” and fails to be theoretical-*practical*, as this is gratefully championed by many (most? all?) Reformed orthodox.

Paul’s Romans is the antidote for the former, Jude’s Letter for the latter. Paul’s Epistle is a huge, awesome, “calmly” composed doctrinal edifice that speaks volumes. It resembles the road deck of a bridge that is stretched out between two Twin Towers, both designated “Obedience of Faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). From start to finish, no “mere theology” for him. Hence the concrete details of Romans 12-15 that cover the waterfront of life!

Paul’s Romans may dwarf Jude’s Letter in size. But the latter is a miniature model that speaks volumes as well. It is “tempestuous” (Jude 3-19), alright. But does its author ever spell out the action that he expects from his readers! It is remarkable that he, against the breathtaking backdrop of the unfathomable and frightful temporal darkness which he so vividly describes, for all practical purposes starts out by exhorting them to stay focused upon the third prong of Christ’s Triple Command, be it in a summary fashion (Jude 20-21). But he ends up summoning them to honor the first prong (Jude 20-23)! The intense pursuit of holiness should always be accompanied by the intense pursuit of souls, facing the even more unfathomable and frightening eternal darkness! Jude is a remarkable Letter writer. It is difficult to imagine a more determined and explicit Prosecuting Attorney. But he is equally determined and explicit in summoning the Church to function as the Defense Attorney for the accused. Similar to Paul, who can “let loose” as God’s spokesman against sin (such as in Rom. 1:18-3:20) and at the same time “weeps” over sinners (Phil. 3:18) in this Jude may well be designated as “Complementarity Personified.” When Paul calls upon us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), it is hard to imagine that he exempts any of us from displaying this characteristic (1 Thess. 1:6) and so from mirroring Jude.

III. “Jerusalem versus Athens”

All this, however, is not to say that with the testimony of the four authors, two of which battle the impermissibly dangerous and harmful Scylla tilt toward God’s transcendence and two the inadmissibly perilous and injurious Charybdis tilt toward God’s immanence, we are out of the woods and can expect clear and unimpeded sailing from now on. The theo-ontological temptation is an ever-present threat. It must be traced back to the original temptation of Satan for mankind to replace God as the ultimate authority and exhaustive source of all possible knowledge and all possible conduct and in arrogant rebellion to claim this prerogative for itself by grabbing for the fruit of the Tree by its telling name. Our first parents fell for this temptation, and candidly, ever since unregenerate mankind, whether blindly or with its eyes wide open, did and does follow in their footsteps. In fact, even regenerate folks who seek to defend God’s truth are often victimized by this apostate “tradition.” The history of the handling not only of God’s perfections that are closely related to his unsearchable transcendence, such as his immutability, simplicity and impassibility, but also of God’s personal condescension that results in his comprehensible immanence and is evident in his perfections, such as his love, his mercy, and his compassion, shows that this temptation all too often proved to be irresistible.

The greatest culprit, according to Paul of course, was, is, and would be the apostate, and therefore empty and deceitful philosophical enterprise (Col. 2:8), whether of the Western or Eastern variety. No one has accentuated this more clearly and emphatically than Tertullian. “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” This is what he asked, “in (what has been called) memorable and bitingly eloquent words.” “What has the Church to do with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? I have no use for a Stoic, Platonic or Aristotelian Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need for speculation.”¹⁰⁵ More about Tertullian in the Conclusion. This section is simply to argue that Tertullian has a point, to put it mildly! So, let us go to it.

Spotlight VI

The Use of Philosophy in Theology

For the “Use of Philosophy in Theology,” especially in Medieval and Reformed Scholasticism, see also Muller, *PRRD*, I, 360-405, esp. 367, 382, 395, 398, 400-405. Muller holds that Post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy can be characterized with the term “‘Christian Aristotelianism’ ... with reference to a generalized philosophical perspective,” especially as it pertains to “logic and rhetoric.” As such, it is allegedly “akin to ‘common sense.’”

¹⁰⁵ See for this Wolterstorff, *IG*, 283, as well as Bavinck, *RD*, I, 125. According to John Marenbon, “The Late Ancient Background to Medieval Philosophy,” in *OHMP*, 22, emphasizes that also Augustine “took a critical distance with regard to pagan thought.” “Although he gives Platonism the highest place among pagan achievements, the context is one in which the virtues of pagans are mere shams, and their limited wisdom not an example to be followed.”

However, Aristotle's Aristotelianism was at times modified, at times mixed with Platonic themes, at times (often?) attacked in its ethics and metaphysics, and always transcended by revealed truth. The latter requires that "philosophy, with language, logic and rhetoric," however helpful, if not "necessary in the formulation of theology, is only an "ancillary handmaid," and the use of reasoning, however proper, is never "primary and despotic," but always "ministerial and instrumental." Reformed orthodoxy, therefore, always starts with "the statements of faith in or according to the text of Scripture and then introduces rational argumentation by way of confirmation (Mastricht)." In a word, "faith is prior to and higher than reason." In fact, "the prior and higher, not unreasonable, truth of faith and revelation illuminates the fallen mind and draws the wreckage of fallen reason to perfection." Reformed orthodoxy "never moves from reason to revelation or from natural to supernatural theology." However, at times both philosophy and human reason must remain *silent*, such as, in doctrines like the Trinity that "can be known only through the revealed Word of God," designated as *articuli puri*. But "mixed articles" (*articuli mixti*), such as, "the doctrine of divine attributes arises both from direct revelation in the Word and from the philosophical use of the *via negationis*, the *via eminentiae*, and the *via causationis* by the negation or denial from imperfections in rational creatures, by the exaltation of perfections in rational creatures, and by the delineation of traces of the divine handiwork in the created order." There are, allegedly, three realities that must be kept in mind. First, all this goes hand in hand with a *specific* interpretation of Col. 2:8 which insists that Paul in his denunciation of "philosophy as vain deceit" is *not* speaking of "the substance of philosophy." His target is only abusive philosophy as a "tool of error and imposture." Philosophy is a "gift of God," and for that reason must be undertaken. Second, all this is based on the "essentially Thomistic presupposition that the truths of revelation, though above and beyond reason (*supra et praeter rationem*), are not unreasonable or contrary to reason (*contra rationem*). According to Turretin (IET, I, 1, viii, 18-19), these truths, while "simply beyond the natural reach of right reason (*ratio recta*) ... are contrary only to corrupt and blind reason and are assailed by it." Third, Muller concedes that "Reformed orthodox theology is certainly more open to the use of reason than the theology of either Luther or Calvin. Nevertheless (he continues) this openness not only has roots in the Reformation itself, but it also carefully retained the Reformers' sense of the independence of theology from purely philosophical or metaphysical speculation. The Protestant scholastic use of reason derives ... from a clearly perceived and enunciated need to use the tools of reason in the construction of theological system ... Not only is rational argument necessary to the elaboration of theological argument, it is also the tool by which conclusions can be drawn in the movement from the text of Scripture to theological formulation. If the Protestant scholastics set aside the antagonism to reason voiced by some of the reformers, they did so only for the sake of elaborating systematically the theology of their predecessors, in the face of the highly sophisticated Roman Catholic polemic and in view of the need to modify system as they knew it, and to draw the tradition of the church into the service of an institutionalized Protestantism." Frankly, all three of these "realities" can stand some further investigation. Is there possibly a cutting edge to Col. 2:8 that is too often overlooked or smoothed out so that it loses its impact? Is Thomism simply a methodology and as harmless as it frequently has been and still is portrayed? And does the continuity trump the discontinuity between Medieval scholasticism and Calvin, on the one hand, and between Calvin and post-Reformation orthodoxy, on the other, as much as this is held, if not promoted and emphasized today? All this does and must get our further attention below. Not so incidentally, all of Muller's four volumes consistently keep an eye on the often (usually) overlooked continuity-discontinuity issue and return to it again and again. Basically, they constitute one argued "plea" to recognize, honor and applaud the continuity in which later thinkers wish to show themselves at one with their illustrious historical past.

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It is a well-known fact that all of apostate philosophy is geared to give a *rational* accounting of the totality of reality¹⁰⁶ that essentially leaves no loose ends whatsoever.¹⁰⁷ With that in (its godless and by necessity anti-trinitarian) mind, it aims specifically to solve the thorny one

¹⁰⁶ So, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Is to V, 3.

¹⁰⁷ See for this, Emilsson, AA, 382. He refers to the "ideal" of Proclus to produce "the one comprehensive philosophy that should embrace all he garnered wisdom of the ancient world." No loose ends and no base left untouched A veritable "Babel Tower of Unassailable Thought that Harmoniously encompasses Everything and Peacefully embraces Everyone."

(universality)-and-many (particularity) problem. So, it will more than pay off to analyze and assess this, especially since Scholasticism of whatever sort, whether Medieval or Post-Reformation Reformed Orthodox, (all too?) frequently looks at the clearly “impressive” philosophical enterprise as a welcome “handmaiden” to make its point, if not insists on the necessity to take this route in order to establish its point! Hence, the next Spotlight!

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Spotlight VII

“The One and the Many ‘Problem’”

For the focus upon “The One and Many Problem,” see at length, Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1962, I, 1, 36, 39, 40, 56, 57, 65, 76, and esp. 93-97, 176, 192, 205, 209, 212-215, 227-228. He provides copious evidence of the frequently expressed fact that “Greek philosophy centers round the problem of the One and the Many. Already in the very earliest stages of Greek philosophy we find the notion of unity: things change into one another-therefore there must be some common substratum, some ultimate principle, some unity underlying diversity” (See Alan Code, “Aristotle’s Logic and Metaphysics” in Furley, AA, 59-60, “General ontology,” according to Aristotle “must study unity.” But it “must also study plurality.” Incidentally, all this slowly but surely developed into the conceptual terminology of (unchanging) “Being” (the unity of the One) and (ever-changing) “Becoming” (the diversity of the Many). The relationship between the two was construed as twofold. On the one hand, the evidence is overwhelming that they co-exist. On the other hand, the antagonism between the two is equally evident. So, they do not live apart from each other and cannot live with each other. Their relationship is one of “co-habitation in strife” and “strife-full co-habitation” (So, emphatically Heraclitus; the “contrastive” nature of the one and the many that turns their relationship into a (perennial) “problem” is impossible to miss!) To safeguard the integrity of “Being” it was celebrated as “immutable” and “immobile” to prevent it from falling victim to the vagaries of becoming. To uphold the reality of Becoming, such as in Heraclitus, it was denoted as “mutable” and “mobile,” to preclude it from turning illusory or intolerably rigid, such as in Parmenides. Aristotle added two layers to this. Metaphysically he identified “Being” as “*actus purus*,” lacking all potentiality for obvious reason, and rationalistically he labeled it “thinking of thinking,” without an object, for an equally obvious rationale. Potentiality was exclusively assigned to Becoming. Copleston argues that the pre-Socratics were unable to solve the Being-Becoming enigma. Neither did Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus for that matter (more about the latter below). Any kind of “hopeful” synthesis always was and always remained right beyond the beckoning horizon of philosophical thought. Copleston also paved the way for the recognition that the *total* history of philosophy, whether Western or Eastern, made it its grand and magnificent obsession to solve this enigma, and miserably failed in each of its repeated efforts. Frankly, its “hope did, does and undoubtedly will spring eternal.” Somehow the solution simply had to be there, waiting to be grasped, right beyond the horizon. But that horizon never ceased to recede with every forward movement, and Sisyphus ruled again ... and again. The bare fact that all philosophers unceremoniously buried their predecessors is “proof positive” that this assessment is fully justified. Candidly, according to Copleston, the “physical science” of their day did not provide early Greek philosophers with “sufficient data to warrant their assertion to unity, still less to warrant the assertion of any particular ultimate principle, whether “water” (Thales), the “*apeiron*” or “indefinite” (Anaximander), “air” (Anaximenes), “fire” (Heraclitus). This made Copleston conclude, understandably so in the light of his self-professed and fully avowed Thomist credentials, that “the early Cosmologists leapt beyond the data to the intuition of universal unity: they possessed what we might call the power of metaphysical intuition, and this constitutes their glory and their claim to a place in the history of philosophy.” In short, they inconceivably “took wing and flew above and beyond of what could be verified by mere empirical observation” and declared “Everything to be One.”

By and large the Church has uncritically adopted, if not eagerly embraced Copleston’s positive assessment. As a result, we find a constant stream, if not a virtually countless number of “grateful” references in its history to the constructs of Greek philosophers, such as “Being versus Becoming,” “Ontological Immutability,” “*Actus Purus* versus Potency,” etc., etc., in the defense of several Biblical doctrines, such as, the Being of God, his

Immutability, his Simplicity, etc. But we may well ask the burning question whether this positive assessment of mind-boggling “flight,” unmistakable “glory” and a richly deserved “place” can be maintained in the light of Paul’s teaching. The latter would decry, in fact, did decry ideas, such as a lofty (unthinkable and stratospheric) *flight*, a veritable (incredible and admirable) “leap beyond the available data” and “a powerful (astounding and splendid) metaphysical intuition in the face of a (hopelessly?) diverse reality.” His message would be and is that all of mankind, inclusive of Greek philosophers, know God and in stubborn rebellion suppress his truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). When Thales of Miletus insists, according to Aristotle, that “all things are full of gods,” he is in the same general ballpark as the poet, whom Paul quotes in Acts 17:28. Both demonstrate that they know God. At the same time in their philosophical productivity they both suppress his truth as well. Their “suppression” calls for *heartfelt* repentance, expelling the infra-structural root of their rebellion (Acts 17:30), and their “productivity” for *wholesale* repentance, purging the super-structural edifice of their output. After all, what they offer the world is not a majestic “flight,” nor a gold-medal “leap,” nor a noteworthy “intuition.” It is an empty (futile) and deceptive (spurious) Siren Song (Col. 2:8). The philosophical “Being-Becoming” construct is fraudulent to the core. The unseen God of Scripture is not an inert “Being” (The One) in contrast to a restless “Becoming” (The Many). [To dress up this philosophical “Being” theologically as brimful of life is to attach the gold of God to a wooden idol and end up with a golden calf. Hence it is a sleight of hand.] Neither is his observable creation a “Becoming” (The Many) in contrast to “Being” (The One). [To dress up philosophical “Becoming” theologically as the flow of Divine providence is equally a sleight of hand. The two have nothing to do with each other.] The God of Scripture is the Uncreated One-and-Many which is structurally reflected in the created one-and-many spheres, which are ubiquitous as “the signature” upon the artistry of his created activity. The philosophical immobile immutability concept is equally fraudulent. The Triune God of Scripture is a fullness of personal life.

The philosophical “*Actus Purus*-Potency” theory is fraudulent as well. The God of Scripture is no abstract, aloof, impersonal principle. While 100% transcendent, he is simultaneously 100% immanent in his interpersonal speaking and acting. If there is any doubt about this philosophical fraudulence, the following recognition is and should serve as an instantaneous cure. Greek philosophy as well as all later Western and Eastern philosophy, once again, has as its overriding if not its sole aim to give a rational accounting of the *totality* of reality that leaves no loose ends whatsoever (See for this also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 3. He designates a philosopher as “a student of the *whole* of reality in its essential nature”). If it has succeeded to establish its “Being-Becoming” construct, its “Immobile Immutability” concept, and its “*Actus Purus*-Potency” theory, the Triune God of Holy Scripture would have been automatically wiped out, that is, by definition. In fact, he would have been a metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical impossibility. Therefore, it is or would be utterly naïve to introduce this manifold and multi-faced Trojan Horse into the sacred halls of a theology that wishes to be true to the aggregate of Scriptural data. It is and would even be criminal if it with wide open eyes does or would take a hold of tools that do or would destroy the Triune God in order supposedly to defend him. To “paste” the above-mentioned “threesome” (the “Being-Becoming” dialectic, the “metaphysical Immutability concept,” and the “*Actus*-Potency” duality) upon our Triune God would immediately disfigure him, promptly emasculate him, and ultimately disenfranchise him altogether. Kamphuis, 185, demonstrates that Justin Martyr is a case in point. Nothing can detract from his apologetic zeal and his joyful martyrdom. But when following his conversion, he remained victimized by the Greek “god-idea” of the One (the Universal) and applied it to the God of Scripture, the Trinity became a virtual casualty in his thinking. After all, in Greek philosophical thought the One (the Universal) and the Many (the Particulars) are mutually exclusive.

It was not until Nicea (325) that all the vestiges of Hellenistic philosophy were officially left behind, and Scripture triumphed. The confession of the Triune God disenfranchises all Greek Philosophy and “politely” as well as “unmistakably” shows it the door. Wolterstorff, IG, 179, has a point when he argues that “the church fathers were sufficiently removed from the cultural power of Greek philosophical thought to be eminently capable of sifting through that part of their inheritance agreeing with what they judged themselves to have good reason to accept and rejecting the rest.” He does not claim that they were always “right on.” But in Nicea they certainly were!! They recognized that the Triune God is not “*Actus Purus versus* potency” or “Being *versus* becoming,” by the farthest stretch of the imagination. It frankly chills me to the bone when I read, see, or hear fine brothers put up a defense of Biblical Theism with assistance and in terms of these “constructs.” They are apostate “molds” fabricated by apostate thinking, and must continue to be shown the door, if the doctrine of “The Holy Trinity” is to triumph in *orthopathos*, *orthodoxy*, and *orthopraxis*! Ury, TP, 66-68, came basically to the same conclusion as Wolterstorff, “Rather than being unwittingly assimilated by the surrounding philosophical culture they (the Niceans) may have unwittingly appropriated and converted the most profound categories of classical thought, thereby radically altering subsequent ontology.” In short, even if the “sound”

remained the same (at times), the “substance” was unrecognizably metamorphosed. To mention one example, “The ‘ousia’ (being) of the Greeks was transformed from impersonal nature to personal reality.”

But there is one more apologetic issue to consider, if not barrier to climb. Scholars, such as Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Rousas Rushdoony, and Ravi Zacharias have also repeatedly called attention to the pivotal function of the one-and-many problem. They also have amply disclosed the reason for its *emergence*. But scant attention has been given to the *contours of a fundamental dialectic* that emerged in the face of it, a dialectic that became the driving force behind all possible activities of apostate mankind with an impact that is universal and astonishing. Let us first look at the reason for the emergence of the problem and subsequently at the contours of the dialectic.

The reason for its *emergence* is simple and straightforward. Metaphysically, humanity with its created one-and-many spheres presents a reflection of the Uncreated Being of God. In the words of Bavinck, RD, II, 331-332, “The Trinity reveals God to us in the fullness of being, the true life, eternal beauty. In God there is unity in diversity, diversity in unity. This order and harmony is present in him absolutely ... In God both are present: absolute unity as well as absolute diversity. It is one selfsame being sustained by three hypostases. This results in the most perfect community, a community of the same beings; at the same time, it results in the most perfect diversity, a diversity of divine persons.” Epistemologically, of course, one can only make sense of the created one-and-many spheres by listening to God’s Book of Instruction, Holy Writ! Finally, ethically the only way to make a practical go of it, as we saw partly already, is to mirror the conduct of God, which calls for self-denial in love and holiness in the created one-and-many spheres reflecting the ontological Trinity, and for sacrifice and submission in the created authority structures reflecting the economic Trinity.

At this juncture we come face to face with the *contours of the fundamental dialectic* and encounter the deepest reason why Paul can, does and must call the philosophies of his day, which are victimized and driven by this dialectic, as “hopelessly futile and destructively deceitful.” Saddled with a darkened heart and a blind mind due to their apostasy from God, they are trapped in a dead-end street (Rom. 1:21, 28; 2 Cor. 4:4), unless and until Christ comes to their rescue (Col. 2:8). This dead-end street is basically an inescapable dialectic *trap* that first captures, then victimizes, further disembowels, and finally demolishes everyone who apostatizes from the Triune God of Scripture. Anyone who misses the diagnosis of Scripture to this effect and thinks that this is “over the top” is invited to take no more than one quick (or long) look at the veritable boiling and seething cauldron of World History to recognize that this has been its bottom line throughout the ages! Because the philosophies of the day serve too often as a spell-binding Siren Song for unsuspecting theologians this trap better be identified for folks to stop their ears and flee from it before it can do irreparable damage. The fundamental dialectic that hovers over, governs, and directs apostate mankind, inclusive of apostate philosophy, is constituted by two poles that *mutually presuppose and exclude* each other.

The mutual presupposition demands that they be synthesized and makes hope spring eternal that somehow, someday, and sometime, this can be done. However, the mutual exclusion guarantees that such synthesis is impossible and shatters all hope whenever it is pursued. The two poles are universality and particularity. Once this fundamental dialectic is in tyrannical control, it entices and requires the apostate human mind to strive for the two mutually presupposing poles (theoretically) to be *thought* together to attain or retain a semblance of its ambitious universal rebel reign and it induces and forces all apostate human life for these poles (practically) to be *brought* together to attain or retain the sanity of a wishful harmonious and peaceful existence. At the same time due to their mutually excluding contrast this dialectic prevents apostate mankind from ever arriving at this utopia and condemns it to a permanent Sisyphus labor. Ironically, it incessantly holds out the very hope that invariably shatters itself.

Anaximander, the second of a triad of Ionian philosophers, with Thales the first and Anaximenes the third one, may well have been the first philosopher who was alert to and found himself upon the horns of this dialectic in the only fragment that is left of his writings, “Whence things have their origin, thence also their destruction happens, according to necessity. For they give to each other justice and recompense for their injustice, in conformity with the ordinance of Time.” Apparently, under the suzerainty of Time, a multiplicity of beings (things) emerges from, or is produced by the *apeiron* (origin). But since this production results in guilt on the part of both Time imposes a penalty upon them. As a result, they must give satisfaction to each other by doing reciprocal penance. The simultaneous mutual presupposition and exclusion of the One (*apeiron*) and the Many (multiplicity of beings) are in crystal-clear evidence. The mutual exclusion (“guilt”) appears to have the final word. This has produced a consensus that all this is a remarkably insightful “philosophy!” Astounding to see a recognition of the contours of the fundamental apostate dialectic, and so the pinpointing of the “victimizer” of all apostate thinking, be it ironically in self-inflicted “ignorance,” which calls for repentance (Acts 17:23, 30)! The reference to “reciprocal guilt and penance,” viewed as indicating “a permanent and unpleasant situation,”

has elicited the assessment that Anaximander's thinking has a "tragic" undertone, if not betrays a "tragic" world vision. Without discounting this, I prefer to see in all this a perceptive, if not "prophetic" insight in the "ontological realism" from an all too human perspective, which incidentally does not necessarily produce sleepless nights. In this there is a similarity with all later philosophical icons who send their impressive "edifices" into the world, knowing that these are failing propositions, soon to be buried, but still "keep on trucking." The real tragedy is twofold. The first one is that these icons simultaneously "see" (Deut. 29:3) the nature of their inescapable dilemma and do not see its "heart" roots (Deut. 29:4) in "their suppression of God" (Rom. 1:18). This also applies to Anaximander! The second, and possibly even greater tragedy is that "the Church" in whatever form has not addressed this in terms of a *Gospel*-apologetics as the only way to set "prisoners" free. It should be crystal clear by now that a Gospel-apologetics after Peter and Paul has been quite rare, if even ever fully extant in Church History. So-called 16th and 17th Century "Classic" apologetics and 19th and 20th Century "Evidential," "Presuppositional," and "Neo-presuppositional" apologetics do not qualify.

At any rate, even if the impact of this now identified dialectic victimizing "trap" may be toned down by God's common goodness and grace, it affects the waterfront of the life of humans as the image of God. Starting with their rebel hearts, it victimizes their thinking, their willing, their feeling, their moral and social make-up, their creative imagination, their speaking, their acting and their dominion-taking. The history of mankind, once again, is there to demonstrate this in every area and aspect of life. Harmony and peace are not attainable, whether philosophically, ideologically, scientifically, economically, politically, militarily, or by any other all too human endeavor. The fundamental dialectic is the apostate man-produced as well as the God-given judgment destructive and deadly virus that governs all one-and-many spheres and all authority relationships, such as marriage, the family, the state, the business, etc., etc. History is not marked by peace with an occasional war. It is characterized by war with (occasional) stretches of peace due to God's common grace in the various areas and aspects of life. This applies to "corporate" as well as "personal" history. The cauldron of controversy, infightings, and wars, so clearly identified by James as the lamentable part of the warp and woof of all history, including the ecclesiastical one, due to the prevailing power of indwelling sin with its ambitions and envies, is unavoidable apart from and without God (Jam. 3:13-4:10)! One should not be fooled by the mitigating influence of common grace. Mankind ordinarily catches its individual or collective breath in its presence, rather than also recognizing it (1) as the ground for God's deserving judgments upon its inexcusable response, and (2) as a sobering and entreating summons to repent (Rom. 2:4; Rev. 16:9, 11).

To top all this off, death has the ultimate say, whether temporal, or what God forbid for all those outside of Christ, eternal death. In the darkness of this grim reality in which the "wrath of God" all too often predominates (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 2:3; Rev. 16:1ff), the Triple Command of Christ (1) becomes an astounding gift, in fact, an incomparable treasure of infinite grace and mercy that lights up the Universe, and (2) turns the mandate for the Church to obey it into a mammoth and all-encompassing necessity. Only the everlasting Gospel (Rev. 14:6) can make mankind ready, and only the eternal Word (Is. 40:8) can instruct it, to deny itself in love and holiness in the one-and-many spheres and to sacrifice and submit in love and holiness in the authority relationships, thus breaking the destructive and deadly stranglehold of the fundamental dialectic and replacing it with harmony and peace. The immense significance to "sanitize" both these spheres and these relationships is immediately comprehended as soon as it is recognized (1) that both structures were created to be and, therefore, are ubiquitous, covering the waterfront of life and dominating its every area and aspect, (2) are fundamentally warped ever since the fall into sin, and (3) can only flourish when the "empty deception" it embodies, is neutralized and defeated by the towering Christ (Col. 2:8) in his person and work. Clearly, Paul grasps all this in full and acts upon it (Rom. 9:2-4; 10:1; 1 Cor. 9:16b, 19-23; 10:32-11:1; 1 Thess. 1:5-8). So, should we! For further details to back up the identification, analysis and assessment of the apostate fundamental dialectic and God's way to demolish it, see, once again, my SR, 17-33, and esp. 20; 87-121. This apostate dialectic dynamics is also the driving force behind the theoretical physics of Stephen Hawking with its zeal to arrive at a Grand Theory of Everything that would synthesize Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (universality) with Heisenberg's Quantum Physics (particularity) (SR, 124-139).

Frankly, the bottom line is this. "The one and many 'problem'" is only a "problem" for the unregenerate heart that operates with the ultimacy of the intellect. Further, it *turns* into a problem for the regenerate heart that operates with the primacy of the intellect. Finally, it is *no* problem when it resides in the regenerate heart that makes the intellect, as well as the will and the emotions, captive to the obedience of Christ. To be sure, when facing the many intricacies of "the issue at hand," it is not always clear sailing. Life is complex by virtue of creation and much more than just complicated ever since the fall. But the way properly to approach, face, and handle these intricacies metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically, is clearly laid out in God's Word.

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To make a long story short, in the victimizing “grip” of the fundamental dialectic with its two mutually presupposing end excluding poles the upshot is that the only ultimate “One” or “godhead” that apostate thinking did, does, will, and can come up with is either “The (rationalist) Immutable Universal,” such as, in Ancient Western philosophy (and Eastern Hindu philosophy), or “The (basically irrationalist) Mutable Particular,” such as, in Modern Western philosophy (and in Eastern Buddhist philosophy).¹⁰⁸ It should be crystal clear by now that the Immutable Universal is as far removed from the Transcendent Immutable God of Scripture as the Mutable Particular is poles apart from the Immanent Personal God of Scripture. So, to dovetail and mix the philosophical apostate with the theologically biblical should be shunned as unacceptable.

To enlarge on this some more, the (Aristotelian) Immutable Universal or “Pure Form” is the lethal enemy of the Triune God. After all, it is essentially an immobile, unmoving, immovable, rigid, fixed, monadic, abstract, solitary, monotonous, lifeless substance or principle, in which rationalistic unity and universality trump and in the process exclude all diversity and particularity, admittedly so. In fact, it would not tolerate them in its company, and would destroy them, if they tried to enter.¹⁰⁹ Hence, as we shall see below as well, one of Aristotle’s often repeated “pillars” is that “being is not equal,” to put it mildly. It is “contrastive.” Hence the *essential* and *unbridgeable* gap between (the being of) “Form” (the universal) and (the being of) “Matter” (the particulars) could not be wider!

But the Mutable (Kantian) Particular is no less lethally inimical. After all, this is basically an empty, contentless, undefinable, unpredictable, unspecified, capricious mathematical point, in which irrationalist diversity and particularity eclipse and dismiss, in fact, annihilate all unity and universality, all protestations to the contrary. In the philosophy

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed summary of the History of Philosophy, in which I explain this, see my SR, 87-111, esp. 95ff.

¹⁰⁹ Will Durant, author of *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of all Times* makes the following observation about Aristotle’s godhead, as quoted in the Dutch translation of Hans Joachim Storig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag); *Geschiedenis van de Filosofie* (Utrecht: Prisma Boeken, 1959), I, 175, rejecting a *regressio ad infinitum* in the cause-effect chain, his “godhead” ends up as “The Unmoved Mover.” In reality, of course, he is impersonal, “essentially pure thinking” (See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 9, “Mind is thinking of thinking;” for this, see also, Beeke, RST, I, 686). As such (it would be humorous if it were not so grim an assessment), this “godhead” “is improbably perfect, can therefore desire nothing, reason why he also does nothing ... His only occupation is to contemplate himself (*noesis noeseos*; thinking of thinking).” Then he adds somewhat mockingly, if not scathingly, “O poor Aristotelian godhead. It is a ‘*roi-faineant*, a do-nothing king’ – ‘the king reigns but does not rule’ – No wonder that the British revere Aristotle, his ‘god’ is obviously the mirror image of their king.” If nothing else, this sheds a new, if not eye-hurting light on any type of Aristotelian scholasticism. Is. 40:18 comes instinctively to mind! Still, there is one additional weighty feature to report, which returns approvingly *verbatim* in the theology of Aquinas, “Since he (the Aristotelian godhead) is the perfect self, he only thinks himself” (See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 9, “Mind thinks itself”). This, as we shall see, puts Aquinas in a bind. How can God “who (supposedly and emphatically) only thinks (and knows) himself” possibly think of (and know) “things other than himself?” Aquinas’ answer must and will receive our careful attention. At any rate, Aquinas’ *verbatim* mirroring of Aristotle underscores once again that his scholasticism is Aristotelian not just *method*-wise, but also *content*-wise (foolish?), to whatever extent this will prove to be the case. Not so incidentally, Aquinas clearly missed the fact, whether consciously and intentionally or not, that “there is an immense contrast between (Plato’s supreme good or) Aristotle’s unmoved mover and the omniscient, omnipotent, and immutable God of creation and providence—the sovereign triune God revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ. To rightly conceive of God, we must follow his word” (So gratefully, Beeke, RST, I, 687). Could this have been glossed over at times in Reformed scholastic orthodoxy, whether in whole or in part?

of Martin Heidegger this reaches its zenith.¹¹⁰ From time to time the former has been properly emphasized.¹¹¹ So was the latter.¹¹² But by and large this double grim assessment as a much-needed warning not to go off the deep end either way was never given, or not heard when given, or it fell on deaf ears. After all, again and again the theo-ontology of apostate philosophy was routinely called in to buttress God's immutability as well as God's mutability. To look into this in detail is the next order of business. It must be analyzed and assessed not in the last place to show that to throw out the bathwater of a questionable defense of a biblical truth does not necessarily throw out the truthful baby with it. In other words, to recognize and insist that the argument for a biblical doctrine needs to be "de-

¹¹⁰ See for this Henry Krabbendam, *From Bultmann to Ott*, my Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and available from its Library. In the main it sketches the philosophy of Heidegger and shows how the early Heidegger influenced Rudolf Bultmann and the later Heidegger Heinrich Ott. This basically put them in a dead-end street and sealed the doom of their theology. By their attachment to Heidegger they shared in his failure to make a compelling case. My regret is that the title of the dissertation makes no mention of Martin Heidegger by name or surname. In Footnote 378 I argue that the structure of the theology of Karl Barth was remarkably identical to the philosophy of the later Heidegger and suffered of the same post-Kantian malady.

¹¹¹ Beeke, RST, I, 221, 245, 248-249, 251, 556, 594, 630, 640, 676, 686-687, 1083, by and large display "an encounter in antithesis" in their analysis and assessment of ancient Western philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. But I am afraid that their disagreement is not *sufficiently* expressed in terms of the Pauline contrast between "empty and deceitful man-made philosophy," on the one hand, and (the person and works of) "Christ," on the other (Col. 2:8), as the (exclusive) repository, if not embodiment of "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3b). These treasures are, by definition, "hidden" to all those who are not united to him (Col. 2:3a). These philosophers, therefore, do not just grope in total darkness themselves but also seek to guide and direct others who share that same darkness, and essentially are "like blind folks leading the blind," whether philosophically, scientifically, or otherwise. What undoubtedly will become apparent in the Judgment as such, better be fully exposed in a clear, bold, and insistent full-Gospel fashion, as long as the darkness still can be replaced by the light in and through heartfelt repentance and faith. Hence, according to the Book of Revelation, the towering beauty as well as necessity of Christ's Triple Command as the exclusive Mandate for the Universal Church in all circumstances and settings (Rev. 11:3) to advance all "life" and prevent all "death!" Incidentally, neither so-called preterists or futurists, who managed to "jail" Revelation for countless millions either in a "past" or "future" prison, are or will be able to apply Rev. 4-18 to today's situation. Only the principle-historical understanding, in contradistinction to the past- and future-historical view, is able to unchain the glory of the Book of Revelation for the Church of All Ages and give it hands-on counsel and direction! As someone put it once, "The Preterist view 'gut-punches' the past Apostate Church, and the Futurist view does the same with the future Apostate Antichrist. But the Universal-Principlist view 'gut-punches' all of us every day."

¹¹² Cornelius Van Til, *Barthianism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962). The title of this volume spells out the thrust of its content and implies a telling assessment of Barth's particularistic theo-ontology! Regrettably, Barth seems to make a come-back. To be sure, he dresses up and fleshes out his dogmatic theology in orthodox language. But due to his commitment to the hegemony of Kantian particularity, this language is no more than a compilation of ciphers that have essentially no correspondence with reality. Structurally, his theology is a mirror image of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger openly admits that in both of the two phases of his objectifying and objectifiable philosophical undertaking his spoken and published language that claims universality by definition is disqualified from the very start by the brute and all-overarching particularity of the non-objectifying and non-objectifiable reality that he wishes to establish as the ultimate reference point of everything. All types of objectifying and objectifiable languages do and must die a thousand deaths in the face of this "Ultimate" (Particularity)! Barth's spoken and published language is infested with the same deadly virus. See for this also, Long, PSTG, 331-338. For all practical purposes Heidegger holds that the only hope lies in a *silent* response to a *silent* summons. But even this sentiment is intrinsically disqualified as human language. See for details once again, Krabbendam, *From Bultmann to Ott*. It analyzes both phases in Heidegger's thinking in detail. Essentially Heidegger weaves an utterly brilliant and impressive web in his efforts to synthesize the one (universality) and the many (particularity) in a truly Kantian fashion. But it misses abiding substance. The end is an "empty deception" (Col. 2:8), admittedly empty by Heidegger himself and bemoaned as such by at least one of his followers for its failure to come to mankind's life-giving rescue.

hellenized,” that is, to be shorn of its apostate ancient-philosophical underpinnings is not to become avid bedfellows with those who reject such doctrine out of hands. In fact, it runs parallel to recognizing and insisting that opponents of a biblical doctrine must make sure to be “de-modernized,” that is, to distance themselves from any equally apostate modern-philosophical underpinnings. All this may seem like a fine line to some. But in reality, the chasm between those who wholeheartedly subscribe to a biblical Doctrine and those who wholeheartedly oppose it is deeper than between those who opt for a mistaken defense and those who eagerly promote the proper defense. Once again, any confrontation of perceived error in this area is only properly “critical,” if it can show that it embodies an “arrogance” that seeks to enter (or even just sniffle at) God’s “secrets” and so becomes a “barrier” that prevents or slows down the pursuit of God’s mandated “ethics,” whether consciously and intentionally or not!

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Spotlight VII

The Theo-Ontological Tradition

The theo-ontological tradition flexed its muscle when it managed to entice a sizable number of Christian apologists warmly to embrace and copiously to utilize the Platonic ontological and the Aristotelian cosmological ‘proofs’ of their impersonal “godhead” (Anselm and Aquinas respectively). It totally escaped them that if Plato and Aristotle had succeeded in making their “proof” stick the God of Scripture would have been debunked as a metaphysical impossibility, and this by definition! Once again, an abstract and monadic Immutable Universal that excludes all particularity does not and cannot tolerate the personal Trinitarian God in whom universality and particularity are co-essential and co-functional, and as a result puts the stamp of his Being on the totality of creation in the ubiquitous one-and-many spheres, discloses himself in the fullness of his blessedness and in the totality of his perfections, insists on his worship in the splendor of holiness, providentially as well as savingly interacts with his creatures, and in a final Judgment issues the verdict of eternal life or eternal death. Frankly, all this would go by the board, if Ancient Philosophy had managed to speak the final apostate, arrogant and defiant word. Besides, there is no trace of a deductive or inductive “theistic proof” anywhere in Scripture. All apologists in the Bible are “proclaimers” of messages that seek to convict (Acts 2:37; 7:51-53; 17:29-30) and to persuade (Acts 26:28; 2 Cor. 5:11), not in a Platonic and Aristotelian fashion with a view to *mental* agreement, but to effect *heart*y repentance and faith (Acts 2:38; 26:28; 2 Cor. 5:20). Arguably, it should not really escape anyone that the theo-ontological tradition with the theistic proofs struck the Church with such an intolerable barrenness that the Reformation became an unavoidable necessity. Frankly, I am not quite sure whether this has always been understood (See for this also, Beeke, RST, I, 231-241, and his survey of “theistic arguments”). At any rate, the bottom line is this. God forbids Israel to go down to “Egypt for assistance, rely on its ‘fleshly’ horses, and so to end up just as empty” (Is. 30:1-7; 31:1-3). To counter this with the argument that “Israel could, in fact, was told to plunder the Egyptians” (Ex. 12:35-36; see for this also Turretin, IET, I, 45) betrays a sleight of hand. The gold, silver and gems that were demanded had an objective value and made up for withheld wages. Ancient Western philosophers, even if they were right twice a day like a broken clock are essentially futile and deceitful. Corporately they recognized this themselves as every single one of them was eventually told that they could not make their world and life view stick and all of them were unceremoniously buried by their successors. At times individual philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, admitted failure during their lifetime. It is to be feared that Medieval scholasticism did not grasp their barrenness, and all too often adopted the contents of their thinking, which was designed to suppress the truth of God in ungodliness and unrighteousness, as tools to promote its cause. This is both passing and lamentably strange. It appears, regrettably as we shall see, that Reformed scholasticism succumbed to a smaller or larger degree to this Siren Song as well. Historically both ended up with ecclesiastical death in the pot. Hence the need for new Church start-ups, such as, the Reformation and Puritanism, all protestations to the contrary. It often seems that these protestations cannot

but show their annoyance, their rejection, their opposition, or even their vehement denigration when the latter is pointed out.

Candidly, I am quite aware that Scholasticism, including Reformed Scholasticism is stoutly defended these days. Muller (in his monumental PRRD, I-IV as well as in several other publications) may well have opened the floodgates for this. It is also evidenced in Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism* (Quoted below as Asselt/Dekker, RS) and Willem Van Asselt, *et alii*, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI, Reformation Heritage Books, 2011) (Quoted below as Asselt, IRS). In analyzing Scholasticism these volumes show that it underwent quite a development. The original view that the aversion of the Reformation of Medieval Scholasticism because of its *content* made it to part company with it (Radical Discontinuity) eventually gave way to the recognition that the Reformation did not quite succeed in this, and continued to “employ scholastic modes of thought” within an “Aristotelian-philosophical conceptual framework” (Negative Continuity). This, however, was not the final phase. This assessment was overtaken by the insistence that Scholasticism should not be defined “exclusively in terms of *content*,” but rather as a “term for scholarly research and instruction carried out according to a particular *method* ... (a way to make) use of concepts, distinctions, analyses, argumentations, disputations and reasonings ... in contrast to other ways of doing theology,” also identified as a “*style* or form of thought ... (using) inductive and deductive reasonings, (as) a “thought experiment” that starts with an issue (*quaestio*) and ends up with a “final statement” of truth via “contra- and pro-argumentation,” a statement that is “rationally defensible,” displays “internal coherence,” and promotes “insight” (Asselt/Dekker, RS, 282-289; see also, Asselt, IRS, 148, 159). The *content* of Medieval as well as later scholasticism may (continue to) be anathema to Reformed thinkers (RS, 233-234, 237-238). But as academic methodology it is at least tolerable and acceptable, if not advisable because of its fruitfulness (RS, 235-237; 289-293). This is by and large today’s mantra (See also, Asselt, IRS, 67-68). As such it was properly present in Medieval theology as well as in Reformation theology, inclusive of the theology of Calvin), and should continue to flourish like that, even taking historical developments into account (Positive Continuity) (For all this, see Asselt/Dekker, RS, 29-32, Asselt, IRS, 7-8, 19-21). At the same time, two items must be kept in mind. While scholasticism, properly understood, may well refer to *method* rather than to *content*. But it is known for its (substantial?) shades of differences among its practitioners. Aristotelian, Renaissance, or other influences are in evidence and therefore may well have given it “a distinctive content-stamp.” Furthermore, it has been underscored that it is confined to *academic* methodology only. Other “verbal communications,” whether written in devotional and other types of literature or spoken in homilies and addresses, do not come into view in this context. In short, it is “simply an analytical and academic *method* to formulate doctrine” (See Beeke, RST, I, 220; Muller, PRRD, I, 186-194; and Fesko, RA, 53-56, 177). But even if this defense of scholasticism as academic *method* could be formally correct, which I am willing to grant for the sake of the argument, the relevant literature of today appears to err in two ways, if not possibly three.

First, it fails to differentiate perceptively and unmistakably between an unacceptable Medieval *content* scholasticism and a useful *method* scholasticism. This is what we find in Calvin. He properly balances the “NO” and the “yes,” a “bitterly polemic” “NO” against the “anti-reformatory” and “abusive” scholastic *content* sophistry that he encountered, and a benign acceptance “yes” toward the scholastic *method* use of “logic and argumentative disputations” (Asselt/Dekker, RS, 51-53). Frankly, such balance is commendable!

But, second, and more significant, the literature does not even begin to look into the *nature* of especially Medieval scholasticism as all too often theo-ontological, which would underscore the “NO.” In fact, this does not even come into its line of vision, and therefore does not and cannot refute the present assessment. In fact, it is not set up and therefore in no position to do so. While the Reformation, of course, recognizes areas of theological continuities (as well as discontinuities) vis-à-vis Medieval scholasticism (as well as vis-à-vis earlier periods in Church History) *content*-wise, such as, the doctrine of the Trinity, the question arises whether it always (ever?) has recognized or does recognize the often theo-ontological nature of its formal, *methodological* treatment of these continuities.

Third, the inquiry is not made, let alone researched, whether processing biblical truth in an Aristotelian logical mold does not tend to “deadend” it, to whatever extent, in that its rationality becomes the focus. When Classic Reformed apologetics piggybacks on this, it invariably goes after mental agreement with its argumentation and does not follow in the footsteps of the apologetics in evidence in Scripture, which always targets the heart unto repentance. In a word, we may do well to examine this carefully. If the conclusion is inevitable that God’s truth transcends the categories of Aristotelian logic, the plot would thicken.

At any rate, all this may also shed new light upon the “Calvin *versus* the Calvinists” thesis. The original claim was essentially that “The very much exegetically and catechetically alive, anti-scholastic John Calvin was supplanted by a deadening Scholastic orthodoxy.” This thesis has been mostly debunked as at least an

overstatement (RS, 231, 255-256, 269), even if it is now generally agreed upon that “a broad doctrinal (and confessional) continuity” did go hand in hand with the “methodological discontinuity” of an “institutional theology” that “technically and logically” did and does focus upon “systematization and codification” (Muller, PRRD, I, 37, 40-52; II, 23-29; 521-524). Still there is a *pertinent* question that remains unanswered. To be sure, scholastic Reformed Orthodoxy with, if not due to its roots in Reformation theology, “massively” appears to have reworked the scholastic Medieval system (Muller, PRRD, I, 51-52). But was it really able to escape the theo-ontological leaven of the Medievals with their focus upon settling the “being” of things with the ever-threatening danger of straying into forbidden territory, rather than putting literally *all* their eggs in the basket of the “ethics” required by “the revealed things” as explicitly mandated by God himself? This would give a new dimension to the “Calvin *versus* the Calvinists” thesis. What may point to a gap between Calvin and his later adherents that is deeper and more substantive than is recognized today is the possibly off-hand comment by the individual who reportedly “has fundamentally altered the landscape of scholarship on Protestantism” (RS, 231), namely that “the Reformers were intent upon distancing themselves and their theology from problematic elements in medieval thought” (Muller, PRRD, I, 37). I doubt whether this can altogether be predicated of their successors with their “highly systematized theology” (Muller, PRRD, I, 46-47). But for the time being, one thing is sure. One will look in vain if one wishes to find an exposition on Divine Immutability, or on Divine Simplicity, for that matter, in Calvin as it is set forth in scholastic Reformed Orthodoxy. But more about this in the next section.

Regardless, the crass form of a theo-ontological mindset is in evidence when it is *either* crystal clear *or* is shown that an abortive effort is made to penetrate the impenetrable or the forbidden, such as in the Trinitarian controversy around Sabellius and Arius, and the Christological one around Nestorius and Eutyches. However, there are *milder* forms, but ultimately equally damaging ones. They emerge, whether consciously and intentionally or not, when they embrace the (Parmenidean) premise of Ancient Western philosophy that “to think is to be,” in which the range of “thinking” and “being” is identical, and are satisfied to map out a *mental* position and to arrive at “The Correct Doctrine,” “The Big Idea,” “The Right Interpretation,” or “The Flawless Message,” as their intended and congratulatory “objective” and “end station.” At that point “reality” is in the basically definitive grasp of the human mind, and, candidly, this is supposedly all that really matters, either ultimately to the unregenerate mind or methodologically to the regenerate one. The content may be superb, whether “An Immaculate Creed,” “A Bull’s Eye Truth,” “A Complete Commentary,” “An Impeccable Sermon,” or “A Spot-on Polemic.” But if they fail to produce outbursts of voiced praise to God *and* powerful ethical obedience to God, they demonstrate that they have succumbed to a theo-ontological barrenness that is content with constructing a *mental* edifice, however elaborate and imposing it may look and how many accolades it may even properly deserve (See for this the constant emphasis, if not insistence of Reformation theologians, such as Turretin, IET, I, 20, and Maastricht, TPT, I, 78-79, armed with quotations from Scripture and from the “fathers” of the early Church, for theology to be *theoretical-practical*). But the most subtle, widespread, and damaging, if not destructive presence of the theo-ontological travesty may well be diagnosed in listeners to messages or in readers of publications who doubtlessly grasp truths of whatever sort, but at best store them as ice cube-like dead capital in the refrigeration system of their intellect rather than drinking it in as the living and life-giving water it is, and treasuring it in their heart, their life-mission control center, in order to avoid sin like the plague and to pursue holiness with a vengeance (Ps. 119:11). It is reported by J. I. Packer, in his Foreword of a publication of the multiple sermons by Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Revival that folks excitedly flocked to his messages. But in the end Lloyd-Jones greatly lamented the fact that the net practical effect of his output was “nothing.” Packer concludes with the sobering question whether history would repeat itself upon the reading of his published sermons. I have more than a hunch that it did.¹¹³ The deadly danger of this all too common if not near-ubiquitous scenario is tellingly and in no uncertain terms diagnosed by James, the brother of Jesus, and emphatically bound on the heart of his readers together with its prescribed cure (Jam. 1:19-25).

All this is more than verified by both the prophet Isaiah and quite a few Psalms. Especially Isaiah 40-66 portray the utterly transcendent God in a majestic and sublime panorama that provides a global vision of most, if not of the sum total of his awesome perfections that more than tower over created reality and all its inhabitants. At the same time, they portray the utterly immanent God in an equally majestic and sublime panorama that provides a global vision of his condescending involvement in and with all his perfections in the totality of created reality and all its inhabitants. In fact, the former is the transcendental condition for the upholding, governing, and directing omni-presence in the latter. As a result of this complementarity of truth the latter cannot but jubilate in endless praise and aim at endless action (Is. 40:24-31). The Book of Psalms is

¹¹³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable* (VWheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989).

not far behind, to say the least! Frankly it is not too remarkable that publications which tilt either toward “deifying” God *above* the down-to-earth standard of Scripture or toward “humanizing” him below the up-and-away standard of Scripture rarely, if at all, display or give rise either to the experience of Biblical jubilation or to the practice of obedience. The theo-ontological tradition is a hard taskmaster. To the extent it prevails it tends to kill heartfelt praise and the pursuit of holiness. It is hardly co-incidental that the Medieval type of *content*-scholasticism cried out to be rescued by the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation and that much of the Reformation type of *content*-scholasticism cried out to be rescued by the *Tota Scriptura* of Pietism and Puritanism. A similar, if not the same cry is (should be) heard when a theo-ontological commitment to one’s Confession prevails, however glorious this Confession maybe in its content, and when a theo-ontological type of preaching carries the day, however superb the message may be in its substance. They leave barrenness in their regrettable wake which, in turn, cries for immediate repentance, with “Biblical Revival” in its awesome aftermath.

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All in all, to tip my hand somewhat already, in the process of the present study it became increasingly clear to me how *awesome* our God is in his biblical Immutability and its underlying simplicity, how we *may* and *must* love him *as such* with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength (Mk. 12:30),¹¹⁴ and how we *do* and *can* reflect him in this in a rich and enriching fashion. Frankly, all this despite the questionable way in which Divine Immutability and Simplicity are defended at times. Such Defense arguably elicited some understandable protests, and therefore did not help the “cause” much. But also, in contrast to the unacceptable way in which the substance of this Defense has been rebuffed, whether in whole or in part. Candidly, this should have prompted more “protests” than it received.

At any rate, the next two Sections canvass the Classic Defense of Divine Immutability and its inevitable “companion,” Divine Simplicity. The first section screens three samples of this defense to get a handle on it. This, of course, hardly covers the waterfront, which is admirably and in near-exhaustive detail done by Richard Muller in his landmark four volumes on the Reformers and post Reformation orthodoxy.¹¹⁵ The proponents of the Classic Defense are part of a theological culture that is admittedly often heavily influenced by Medieval scholasticism. Especially Aquinas has made its mark in this regard. So, the second section does and must deal with an analysis and assessment of the latter’s thinking. This will not cover the waterfront either. For this I refer to an equally erudite landmark study by Stephen D. Long which seems near-exhaustive as well.¹¹⁶ But because of Aquinas’ widely admitted influence we have no choice but to take a close look at it to receive the proper depth-perspective.

¹¹⁴ The order of heart, soul, mind, and strength is no coincidence. (1) There is and can be no genuine love of God that does not spring from a regenerate “heart” (Deut. 5:29). (2) There is no and can be no full-orbed love of God that does not cover the whole “soul” (Lk. 1:46). (3) There is no and can be no defined love of God that does not capture “the mind” (1 Pet. 1:13). (4) There is and can be no operational love of God that shows no “strength” in powerful action. The “heart” of man is his life-mission control center. All the issues of life originate in it (Prov. 4:23). The “soul” of man, identical to his spirit, is the total non-material part or dimension of man (Mt. 10:28). It covers the human heart, its three internal functions of thinking (!), willing and feeling, its moral and social dimension, its creative imagination, its speaking, and its acting. All these components are to be suffused with the love of God. The “mind” of man stands for his well-defined concentration upon a settled purpose (Phil. 1:27). The “strength” of man is on display in the Holy Spirit empowerment (Acts 1:8) to advance the Kingdom in every area, facet, nook, and cranny of the earth (Mt. 28:19-20).

¹¹⁵ Muller, PRRD, I, II, III, and IV.

¹¹⁶ Long, PSTG.

My focus differs some from that of both Muller and Long, whom I intend to quote at crucial points. It seeks to determine whether or to what extent both Aquinas and the Classic Reformed defenders of Divine Immutability and Divine Simplicity honor the complementarity of truth, which forbids all “prying” into the “secrets” of God (Deut. 29:29a), and to what degree their theologizing mentions and serves the cause of the Divinely mandated holiness, epitomized in Christ’s “Grand Triple Command” (Deut. 29:29b). In short, the question is whether they keep the *proper* “child-like” (Ps. 131:2) distance from the “essence” of God and *fully* “slave-like” (Jam. 1:1) identify themselves with the “ethics” of God. This is not the (twofold) focus of either Muller or Long. They constantly focus upon the continuity-discontinuity issue with reference to Medieval scholasticism (Muller), especially Thomas Aquinas (Long), in its relationship to the further theological developments in the Reformation/post-Reformation (Muller) and later (Long) orthodoxy. Both do argue on a consistent basis, whether ultimately (Muller) or fully (Long), that continuity trumps discontinuity. Both also mention the sources from which Medieval and post-Reformation scholasticism (Muller) and especially Aquinas (Long) “drank.” My focus requires probing into the underlying philosophical roots of these sources. This is not in the purview of either Muller or Long. Hence, depending upon the outcome, our final conclusions may not always be identical or even dovetail.

IV. The “Classic” Defense

This section presents three samples of what well may be the Majority Report in the Defense of Divine Immutability/Simplicity. Its representatives have no doubt that this Doctrine is derived from the aggregate of the pertinent Biblical Data and are in line with the ecclesiastical tradition. But they often adopt a type of reasoning in the defense of Divine Immutability as well as Simplicity which appear to mirror that of apostate thinkers and their philosophies.¹¹⁷ This deserves a close look to find out and determine whether they honor God’s twofold agenda explicitly laid out in Deuteronomy 29:29.

¹¹⁷ This is *emphatically* acknowledged and *openly* applauded by Craig A. Carter, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Metaphysics: Why we need to recover Christian Platonism,” in James M. Renihan, ed., *Journal of IRBS Theological Seminary* (2019), 7. Writes he, “There is long standing tradition of integrating the valid insights of the best of Greek philosophers (that is those within the Platonic tradition) with the Bible. It is this tradition that I believe must be recovered if historic, Nicene orthodoxy is to be *preserved* (italics, mine) and passed on to another generation.” He then adds, “Reformed Thomism is the particular form of Christian Platonism that I find most convincing.” “I would suggest that the deep structure of the Christian Platonist worldview ... accords very well with the deep structures of the Bible.” It should not escape anyone that quite apparently (The Trojan Horse (?) of) Platonism must come to the rescue (?) of Biblical truth if it is to be *maintained* and handed down. The question may well be asked and will be asked below whether this at all compromises the sufficiency of Scripture. Could it possibly even tone down its necessity and authority, at least emotionally? Regardless, all this comports with, if not comes down to a type of apologetics that aims at mental agreement and cannot possibly mirror the biblical type that addresses the heart unto repentance. In all candor, King Asa comes to mind. He prayerfully and successfully leans on the Lord and his Word when one million Ethiopians threaten to engulf him (2 Chron. 14:9-14). But when Baasha, the King of Israel, seeks to bottle him up, he goes to the Syrians to *maintain* his present status and to *guarantee* his future (2 Chron. 16:1-6). When the prophet Hanani takes him to task, the latter ends up in jail (2 Chron. 16:7-10). To top it off, what a tragic end (2 Chron. 16:12-13) after such an auspicious beginning (2 Chron. 15:1-19). Well, we will have to wait and see whether this analogy has any validity. But if it has, it gives us a telling bird’s eye view upon the Reformation Church. Its beginning was more than auspicious. In this it virtually followed in Asa’s footsteps. But eventually it made use of, if not adopted Thomistic scholasticism that admittedly had the stamp of Platonic, Aristotelian and Plotinian philosophy upon it to institutionalize and *protect* its legacy and to *secure* its future. This should at least raise some eyebrows, if not alarm bells, also about the possible enrolment in Institutions that uncritically endorse this course of action. See for all this also the frequent references to the “Christian (be it, at times modified) Aristotelianism” of the scholasticism of Reformed orthodoxy by Muller, PRRD, I, 40, 41, 51-52, 71-74, 84, 119-121, 141-143, 145, 355, 361, 363, 365, 367-369, 37, 373, 376, 381, 396, 446. Frankly, “the end” of orthodoxy was not altogether pretty. Both an invasive rationalism and a corresponding lack of life made it necessary for Pietism and Puritanism to resuscitate the Church, and to restore its fortunes. Even if Muller’s judgment is correct that Christian Aristotelianism did not pave the way for rationalism, it clearly did not contain the “wherewithal” to prevent or stop it. Enough said, for the moment, until we (must) take a closer look at all this. If Reformed orthodoxy was so massively impressive in making it an “institutionalized” force to be reckoned with (Muller!), why was it so quickly and unceremoniously shoved aside by the Rationalism of Modernity, a situation that was compounded by the Irrationalism of Post-Modernity? The five-volume lament by David Wells about today’s “barren landscape” presents us purposely with a grim detailed assessment. See David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993); *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994); *Losing our Virtue* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); *Above All Earthly Powers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2005); and *The Courage to be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008). Even where this assessment is acknowledged as right on the money, the question was

The first sample is taken from the same Herman Bavinck who enthralled us with his fully biblical exposition of Divine Immutability.¹¹⁸ This requires us in the end to take a close and extensive look at Aquinas whose influence upon Reformed orthodoxy until the present time been increasingly recognized and (all too?) often appreciated, if not applauded, as is evidenced in the second and third sample.

The second sample covers a 16th Century Italian theologian, by the name of Giralomo Zanchi (1560-1590), who is said to be a near-mirror image of Aquinas regarding his conceptual structure and vocabulary in his theology proper, his exposition of the Doctrine of God.¹¹⁹ This accentuates the need to analyze Aquinas.

The third is taken from two recent publications that are equally Thomist to a considerable extent, J. V. Fesko's *Reforming Apologetics*, and a Charles J. Rennie article, in Baines, *Confessing the Impassible God*. This compels us to assess Aquinas!

1. First, then, Herman Bavinck. Despite his applause of Athanasius in his refusal to go the "theo-ontological" route, he nevertheless, be it hopefully in an unguarded moment, regrettably fell victim to it when he stated, "Not only does Scripture testify that in God there is no variation nor shadow due to change (James 1:17), but reflection on this matter also leads to the same conclusion. Becoming presupposes a cause, for there is no becoming without a cause. But being in an absolute sense no longer permits the inquiry concerning a cause. Absolute being is because it is. The idea of God (!) itself implies immutability."¹²⁰ The much more accurate translation of the Dutch original is even more telling, "Thinking (that is, the "thinking" of the (his) day) (Dutch: "het denken," "as-is") also leads to the same conclusion ... the God-idea (god-idea?) as such (already) implies immutability." With this he clearly refers to the Aristotelian type of thinking, that is, Aristotelian reason, and the Aristotelian "god-idea."¹²¹ There was nothing else around within his theological horizon.¹²² Of course, eventually the Kantian type of thinking, that is, Kantian reason, and the Kantian

raised why he did not recommend a necessary antidote. When this was finally published in a sixth volume, *God in the Whirlwind* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), it evoked the further question why it was so general and not more detailed. Well, detailing the assessment and the antidote can hardly be effective without a diagnosis of the cause of the downgrade. Muller's monumental four volumes do not look into this. Be the latter as it may, unless a (possible) "rot in the root" is defined and removed, it is difficult to expect for an "upgrade" to replace a "downgrade."

¹¹⁸ Once again, see Bavinck, RD, II, 285. See also, Turretin, IET, 204-206.

¹¹⁹ So Harm Goris, "Thomism in Zanchi's Doctrine of God," in Van Asselt, RS, 131-132, 138.

¹²⁰ Bavinck, RD, II, 158.

¹²¹ By endorsing Bavinck here, Beeke-Smalley, RST, I, , indicate that they have not quite grasped the questionable nature of this argument! **CHECK REFERENCE**

¹²² We better recognize, and cannot emphasize enough, that both types of "thinking" and "god-idea" are part and parcel of autonomous philosophies that would have done away with both the Christianity *and* the God of Scripture if they had been successful. Both the "god" of Ancient and the "god" of Modern Philosophy are diametrically opposed and unalterably destructive of the Biblical God, to be further explained in detail below. Thankfully, both proved to be dead-end streets by the grace of God. But this accentuates the utter need to abstain from either type. When Tertullian came to the definitive conclusion that the infestation by autonomous philosophy produced all the heresies of his day, he powerfully rang the alarm bell, the sound of which did and should reverberate throughout the ages. To him it was clearly a matter of life and death. It should be the same for us. Wolterstorff, IG, 283, in an honest and correct observation, which is to his credit, draws attention to the fact that Tertullian's question, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens," is (and should) be an *enduring one* (emphasis, mine). After all, we simply *must* recognize, in the footsteps of Paul, that the philosophies of the Ancient and Modern kind, as well as the theologies that piggy-backed upon them, failed disastrously to present the "Eternal Gospel," in fact, eviscerated it, whether consciously or not, and so have destroyed countless souls. Where are the sleepless nights that reflect this indisputable fact and "fill its godly 'victims' with understandable horror?" "Sleeping folks" are hardly recipients of Christ's commendation (Mt. 26:40, 43).

“god-idea” would all too frequently prevail and become very influential. As this radically different thinking infested the more recent theologies, they would reverse Bavinck’s conclusion that seemed so compelling during his lifetime and in his circles in a heartbeat. In a word, the table would be and now is turned. “Today’s ‘thinking,’ which *essentially* (!) attaches ‘becoming’ to the current ‘god-idea,’ rather than ‘being,’ does and must imply ‘mutability’!” With this, (Aristotelian) Immutability would and did give way to (Kantian) Mutability, such as, in Karl Barth’s Kant-infested *Church Dogmatics*, as we shall see. At any rate, in the *present* location of Bavinck’s *magnum opus* the Christian’s *faith* that surrenders to, embraces, and abandons itself to Scripture *alone* (*Sola Scriptura*) is at the least augmented, if not replaced by an all too autonomous (authoritative, Aristotelian) human “thinking” process, and the self-disclosure of God supplanted by a “warmly welcomed” so-called (already present, Aristotelian) “god-idea.” From this we can minimally conclude that Bavinck did not always express his predominant 20/20 vision of the essential and radical difference of the God of Holy Writ and the necessarily impersonal “god” of the philosophers, something in which he was not alone, as we shall see as well.¹²³

At any rate, all this raises a serious question. What about Paul’s analysis that the “blind human mind” (Rom. 1:21) apart from the illumining Spirit cannot “receive the things of God” (1 Cor. 2:14), hoodwinked by Satan’s deception (2 Cor. 4:4)? And what about his assessment that the heart as its life-mission control center apart from the light of God suppresses the knowledge of God in ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 21; 2 Cor. 4:6)? So, why would (should) we not raise our eyebrows, to put it mildly when in the reference to the (so-called “awesome” Aristotelian) thinking process and the (so-called “awesome” Aristotelian) god-idea rather “suddenly (?)” the Aristotelian type of immutability is not yet (in the course of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*) or no longer (in his thinking) a matter of a “mere name, a sound, an empty term?”¹²⁴ “Presently” Divine Immutability is supposedly inherent to a “god,” as he is philosophically defined as “Being” *versus* (!) “becoming,” and as an *Actus Purus*, if not *Purissimus*, *versus* (!) potentiality.¹²⁵ Its corollary is that the utter

¹²³ Muller, PRRD, III, 309, observes a similar pattern in Amandus Polanus (1561-1610). He first “argues for immutability on the basis of biblical texts, citing Jam. 1:17; Ps. 102p;rfay : 29; Is. 46:10; Rom. 11; and Hebr. 6:17, understanding immutability of the divine being as necessary to the immutability of God’s will or counsel.” But then he adds a line of reasoning in “philosophical (Aristotelian and Thomist) language, *unlike* the language of the text of Scripture,” that puts us “*in quite a different world*” (emphatic italics, mine). “Since God himself is ‘the primary mover and effector of all good’ and since his ‘unmoved being is the cause of the motion of all other things,’ God must be considered as immutable.” The latter is *content*-scholasticism with a vengeance! Frankly, this kind of reasoning *today* would (should?) give theology understandably a bad name and is something the Church can do without!

¹²⁴ Bavinck, RD, II, 331!

¹²⁵ See for this also at length, Kamphuis, 22. The concept of *actus purus* or *actus purissimus* is, in reality, empty and therefore deceitful. It is empty. For a starter, one is hard put to define it intelligibly. But furthermore, it is the predicate of Aristotle’s godhead, which is defined by him as “Thinking of Thinking,” or “Pure Form,” which is nothing but the “Absolute Universal,” not compromised or to be compromised by any or anything particular. This makes it contentless and stamps it as empty, by definition! No wonder that it is simultaneously deceitful, by definition! To *equate* Aristotle’s empty “godhead” with the JHWH of Scripture may well be, in fact, is to sin against the Third Commandment that forbids anyone to ascribe “emptiness” to him. What else can we call Aristotle’s “godhead” other than “deceitful” when its “emptiness” is essentially presented, whether explicitly or implicitly, as the cornerstone, if not ultimate reality upon which mankind can pin its “hope?” Finally, to *equate* this empty and deceitful “godhead” with the awesome fullness of being and life in the Personal Triune God of Scripture may well be, in fact, is essentially (!) also a sin against the First Commandment in which God forbids his people to consider, adopt, and worship other “gods.” This includes the worship of an *actus purus* or even an *actus purissimus*! Even, if scholasticism *per se* were

and indispensable need for the Gospel of Christ to give theological thought its legitimacy and its proper content, as this is emphasized and pursued by Paul as mankind's only hope (2 Cor. 4:4b-5), simply takes the back seat, in fact, vanishes from sight altogether.¹²⁶ Is it not time to pray for the scales to fall from the eyes of any apologist in defense of the existence and truth of God so as radically and totally to distance himself from the use of any philosophical "tool" that by definition denies even his possible existence and vitiates his truth?

To this can be added the "testimony" of Paul that "his message and its proclamation" never came down to "a highbrow, all too clever type of speech," that is, to "high-powered persuasive words of all too foolish human 'wisdom'" derived from his contemporary world and its prevailing icons, so as to gain traction with the Jewish and Greek mind. Rather it was "in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" to produce a heart transplant through the cross and resurrection of Christ with a resultant faith that found its resting place not in the product of man, but in the doing of God (1 Cor. 1:17-25; 2:1-5, 12-13; 15:1-19).

In all candor, I miss this in scholasticism of whatever sort. Whatever the merits, especially of Reformed scholasticism may have been or may still be, allegedly to prevent an ecclesiastical Reformation floodtide of abundant (Revival-) life to turn into an ebbtide, it may well be that despite its intentions it contributed to what it sought to prevent.¹²⁷ Whatever one's opinion about this for now, it is hard to deny that the "ebbtide" has prevailed in our post-Christian West, and can stand a lot more probing inquiries into the reasons "why," especially in Institutes of Higher Learning, than is in evidence today. At any rate, when the Revival floodtide hit Antioch in a spontaneous expansion of the Church by unstoppable Spirit-filled believers, of all things as a result of persecution, its subsequent teaching leadership only added to this floodtide (Acts 11:19-26). In that context there was no scholasticism to guard its legacy and therefore (?) no need for a consequent Reformation or Puritan type of Movement even to be on the horizon. The pursuit of the "revealed ethics," that is, the Marching Orders of the Commander-in-Chief to make disciples, to baptize them,

no more than a harmless methodology, the Aristotelian theo-ontological leaven that admittedly permeates the Medieval (and some of Reformation?) variety disqualifies it from being a reliable guide. The spiritual downgrade that invariably followed in its wake, which, once again, called for a "fresh" re-start both in the Reformation and eventually in Puritanism, may well prove that it was a Trojan Horse which should have been refused to enter the ecclesiastical scene. Not so incidentally, the Aristotelian conceptual dilemma of "being" versus "becoming" must be shown the door as well. See for this Kamphuis, 178-188, as well. Regardless, whatever the final verdict about the Medieval and Reformed scholasticism may be, adoption of the "contrastive" Aristotelian twin concepts of "being"/*actus purus* and "becoming"/*potentia* by Medieval and Post Reformation theologians settles once and for all that they embrace Aristotelian content as well as method. Hence the claim that their scholasticism is only "harmlessly" methodological has no basis in fact.

¹²⁶ Billy Graham reportedly once characterized the Dutch Reformed Church as "the sleeping giant," evangelistically.

¹²⁷ If Turretin's landmark contribution to Reformed orthodoxy, IET, I, II, III, is any indication, it is fair to conclude that the latter in its ecclesiastical "institutionalization," its confessional "codification," and its apologetic "fortification" of the Reformation, that is, in its over-all culture, academic and otherwise (Muller, PRRD, IV, 395), did not pay much or any attention to the mandated and therefore necessary pursuit of Christ's Triple Command as an essential part of its so-called theoretical-practical systematic theology. Perusal of Muller's four fact-packed volumes, PRRD, I, II, III, IV, that cover all the stalwarts of Reformed orthodoxy in near-exhaustive detail (emphatically?) underscores this conclusion. In the volumes of both Turretin and Muller we find only occasional references either to Mt. 28:19-20 or to the Gospel. But the latter is never defined and the former not bound upon the heart of the reader. "Holding the fort" is a worthwhile, if not a necessary and precious achievement (Jude 1ff). But failure to equip and urge the deployment of God's Army that occupies the fort may gratefully start out with sheltered, if not abundant "life in the pot," but it is liable, if not bound to end up with "death in the pot!" Fresh "Jordan" water does not stay "alive" much or long in a "Self-contained Sea" without any outlets!

and to teach them a life of obedience reigned supreme and was this ever effective! Frankly, it is difficult to imagine that and how folks (husbands and wives!), who became “fugitives” in foreign territory due to deadly persecution, decided to proclaim Jesus rather than to start looking for a job as their first priority (Acts 11:19-20). Apparently, they ranked their “life” (Jesus) higher than their “livelihood.” No wonder that God honored this in multiple conversions (Acts 11:21).¹²⁸ Hopefully the present-day Church is sufficiently impressed by the Antiochian Holy Spirit “floodtide” to start hungering for it to return to its shores, and not to pin its hopes upon a type of scholastic thinking that historically and ostensibly was not able to prevent the ebbtide, whatever its merits or demerits may have been or still be.

At any rate, the appearance of Bavinck’s *faux pas* should not come as too much of a surprise. After all, what ultimately appears to be a regrettable side-line in Bavinck¹²⁹ had infested the theo-ontological thinking of the Church with a vengeance throughout its history. No wonder that it served as a kind of Siren Song in Bavinck’s days as well. In a word, it was in widespread evidence when Bavinck appeared on the scene. Admittedly Justin Martyr already portrayed a heavy influence of Greek philosophy.¹³⁰ But did this also infest the scholastic philosophical theology of Aquinas who is increasingly heralded today? This is a *pivotal* question precisely because he gets a (rather) clean bill of health in many circles, including in the circle of Reformed scholars who seek to revitalize Classic Reformed Theology which is heavily influenced by Aquinas.¹³¹ Hence he needs to be researched and answered. It is impossible to come up with an appropriate assessment of scholastic Reformed orthodoxy, in evidence until the present time, without making up our mind about Aquinas, either way. But before we turn to this in the next section the two samples taken from Zanchi and the two more recent publications from Fesko and Rennie as mentioned above are now presented to demonstrate how much Aquinas has been allowed to influence the thinking of post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy and how much he has been permitted to continue impacting the theologizing in Reformed circles until the present. The latter may well be the main reason why his thinking needs to be probed and assessed. So, let us go to it and find out what they bring to the table.

So, in addition to Herman Bavinck, there are two more telling samples of those who at least in part sat at the feet of Aquinas, not only in his *method*-, but also in his *content*-scholasticism.

¹²⁸ History repeated itself in the Early Church in a hostile Roman Empire, in the Reformation Times in the midst of an oppressive scholastic Romanism, and on Today’s Ecclesiastical Scene in the face of an antagonistic Communist regime in China, a Hindu Regime in India, and a Muslim Regime in the Middle East. It is remarkable that historically the greatest and most effective Evangelistic outreach always seems to take place in the “heartland” of persecution (Acts 8:4ff; 11:19ff)! Today’s India and China could well underscore this persuasively.

¹²⁹ In Bavinck, the later RD, II, 331 virtually eclipses the earlier RD, II, 158.

¹³⁰ Bavinck, RD, II, 282-284. See also, Kamphuis, 185; Gerald Bray, “Explaining Christianity to Pagans: The Second Century Apologists,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 9-25; and Ury, TP, 89. Justin Martyr heralds the “Christian apophatic tradition regarding the ineffable nature of God ... Yet this God was purported to have revealed Himself. The paradox is inescapable. The Unknowable has made himself known.”

¹³¹ Today’s attempts to revive a scholastic Thomism has been called a “fad.” To pursue such “revival” is fraught with an inherent danger. It is a well-known fact that Aquinas was a Semi-Pelagian. This means that the utter need for biblical regeneration as a heart-transplant eluded him. This, in turn, could not but affect his apologetics negatively. It has no other choice but to focus upon *mental* agreement. No wonder that it left ecclesiastical and personal barrenness in its wake. A clock that is not wound up or plugged in may give the right time twice a day. But is it wise to turn it into one’s regular timepiece?

2. The second such sample is found in Zanchi, a significant contributor to the early Reformation theology (16th Century). In the words of a commentator, he “does not hesitate to appeal to philosophical doctrines, especially Aristotle’s, in explicating his theological views. He is quite aware of the fact that this is not undisputed and that his readers may take offense ... (But) he defends the necessity of using philosophy in academic theology: ‘For there are very many divine attributes (which comprise the nature of God) that in my opinion *cannot* (italics, mine) be sufficiently explained or even understood *unless* (italics, mine) that which is offered to us by Philosophy is accepted and applied.’”¹³² Here a supposed “handmaiden” is virtually introduced as the “mistress.”¹³³ This, of course, is an *astounding* statement, if not ironically a self-condemning handwriting on one’s own wall, that must make everybody scratch his head, if not pain his heart. Apparently, Scripture, the eternal Word, *all by itself* is not up to the task. Philosophical input, of the Thomist type (!), is a *necessity*! This should rankle every Bible believer. What is behind it is undoubtedly a view of theology that spills over in apologetics, which is based on the primacy of the intellect which is called upon to (and will) provide truth with an unassailable mental anchorage. This makes the philosophical enterprise which is based on the ultimacy of the intellect the “handmaiden” of choice. Zanchi’s early training in Thomist thinking with its *fides quaerit intellectum* mantra had such a stranglehold on him that he uncritically, enthusiastically, and admittedly by necessity, adopted it theologically as well as apologetically!

At any rate, among the attributes we wish to see him cover in the present context are the “simplicity” and the “perfection” of God. In addressing these attributes, he avails himself of the very type of philosophy that is embedded in the works of Thomas Aquinas.¹³⁴ In fact, he is virtually in total methodological and substantive lockstep with the Medieval *content-scholasticism* as it is epitomized in Aquinas’ philosophical scholasticism. This is not “a fly by night” observation. It has been carefully and persuasively documented.¹³⁵ So, let us follow his reasoning and its outcome.

First, because God is marked by an exclusively non-composite *simplicity* and so by an exclusively unique *perfection*, “God is an equivocal cause.” He is incomparable! Not only is he identical to his perfections essentially. In him all perfections are also identical and synonymous!¹³⁶ As such he is radically and totally *beyond* our reach, which, as we shall see, includes all our thinking and all our language.

¹³² Quoted in Harm Goris, “Thomism in Zanchi’s Doctrine of God,” in Van Asselt, RS, 124. See for this also, Renihan, *God with Passions*, 93-109.

¹³³ As quoted in Fesko, RA, 23, Anthony Burgess (d. 1644) warned that “the light of Nature” should always be and remain a “hand-maid, never a mistress.” He further states that when its “light” either turns into “darkness” or constitutes “darkness,” it should be resisted and not even be allowed to function as a “hand-maid.”

¹³⁴ Goris, 126-136, indisputably argues this point. Zanchi echoes the Thomist notions of simplicity, analogy, the three *viae*, etc. See for Aquinas’ extensive use of and dependence upon Aristotle, James Doig, “Aquinas and Aristotle,” in OHA, 33-42, esp. 41, “Truly, for Aquinas, Aristotle was *the* Philosopher.” See also Russell L. Friedman, “Latin Philosophy, 1200-1350,” in OHMP, 209. He talks about an “explosion in the explicit use of Aristotle,” already “in his earliest major work (mid-1250’s) ... there are two thousand quotations there from Aristotle.” This exemplified Aquinas’ “desire to utilize Aristotle in all aspects of philosophy and theology.”

¹³⁵ Goris, 131-132, 138, demonstrates that Zanchi in developing his Doctrine of God follows Aquinas closely, if not to the letter, apart from two minor divergencies, and one possibly more serious one. The latter will call for our attention below.

¹³⁶ On this the jury may still be out. At least, one commentator has opined that this is not a “cut and dried” case. More about this below. Candidly, it seems to me that the “synonymity” issue is not a “universally” settled one among the Reformed orthodox in the first place. More about this, and the possible reasons for this, below as well.

Second, however, because “all creaturely perfections preexist in God as its cause” we may and must walk the *via causalitatis* to arrive at God. After all, “our” “perfections are to be attributed” to him as the cause of all things created. While metaphysically God may have the prior credentials since a cause invariably precedes its effect, epistemologically philosophical theology must reason in the reverse order, from effect to cause. Here the plot thickens some. It has been argued that “The top-down movement of knowing, which Aquinas reserves for revelation in contradistinction from the upward movement of philosophy, belongs to the Neo-platonic correction of Aristotle.”¹³⁷ This should get our attention yet!

Third, because of the simplicity of God we must walk the *via negativa*. “All the perfections are in God not by way of composition.” Hence, they are “in an incomprehensible mode.” This means that God is more known for what he is not, than for what he is!¹³⁸

Fourth, because simplicity and perfection are inseparable, we must walk the *via eminentiae*. “All perfections are in God in the most perfect or sublime way,” that is, “in a more eminent mode.”

Fifth, because God is “an equivocal cause,” human ascriptive terminology cannot possibly be “univocal.”

Sixth, because God interacts with mankind it cannot possibly be “purely equivocal” either.

Seventh, because “univocity” and “equivocity” are both ineligible concepts to predicate anything pertaining to God, human God-language can only be “analogical” (whatever this means).¹³⁹ “All divine names have a creaturely mode of signifying. This mode of signifying cannot be rectified or annulled because it is given with the syntactic and semantic structures of human language.” But it must apparently be treated with “some suspicion.”

Eighth, because “the doctrines of divine simplicity and perfection” identify God as an “equivocal cause,” they “support the theory of analogical God-talk” as a midpoint between “univocity” and “equivocity.”

Ninth, although God’s “attributes are in reality absolutely identical with the one, perfect, divine essence ... This does not turn all divine names into synonyms, for the divine attributes differ conceptually.” However, “this diversity *only* inheres in our intellect, and hence in our language, but not in God.”

By way of initial comment, those who are critical of Aquinas’ *content*-scholasticism as basically theo-ontological may well characterize all this as a “Regrettable Continuity” that needs to be avoided.

At any rate, this type of reasoning is a stock in trade in the third sample as well. Hence its assessment is postponed until the latter is reviewed.

¹³⁷ Wayne J. Hankey, “Aquinas, Plato, and Neo-Platonism,” in OHA, 62. This interpretation infers that in Aquinas Plato and Aristotle vie for the supremacy. Long, PSTG, 63-64, questions this. He would argue that the top-down movement originates in Scripture. But he does not deny that the upward movement is Aristotelian in nature. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I, 1, 204, attributes this upward movement to Neo-Platonism as well. Most likely we encounter a joint influence.

¹³⁸ Goris, 130,132. In Zanchi “the negative fundamental tone of his theology” predominates. The mode of the perfections of God “cannot be perfectly explained by the human intellect.” It defies definition!

¹³⁹ According to Long, PSTG, 226, the analogy concept has been called “problematic.” Analogical language uses “words in a different sense from the normal sense.” But this comes with a price. “The more the meaning of words is analogically extended, *the less informative* (italics, mine) the words are.” Once God is declared to be “out of sight,” should not this entail, “by good and necessary consequence,” that *all* (s-called analogical) words to describe him cannot possibly have *any* informative value? It certainly seems so!

3. This third sample covers two publications of recent vintage that opt for “Positive Continuity”¹⁴⁰ and either seek to “rehabilitate” (whitewash?) Aquinas as exemplifying a *method-scholasticism* that is perfectly acceptable,¹⁴¹ or go to great length to adopt his philosophical *content-scholasticism* tool as a major foundation stone to assist us in establishing Divine attributes, inclusive of Immutability.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ This is really a “double continuity.” Orthodox Reformed scholasticism is continuous with (1) the Scholastic medieval method of dialectical, disputative, and argumentative codification of theological thought in cohesive and coherent form as well as with (2) the doctrinal thinking, message, and proclamation of the Reformers. As such, “it is enclosed in a (long) five-hundred-year history” compared to “the brief phenomenon of the Reformation,” even if the latter is “the formative event.” This way of putting it is said to be preferable to construing it in terms of a doctrinal continuity and methodological discontinuity with the Reformers. See, Muller, PRRD, I, 28-29, 37-38, 45-46, 51-52. We are also told that Reformed orthodoxy borrows the typical Medieval scholastic language of “being and becoming,” “potency and act,” “essence and existence,” and focuses on the “systematic conceptuality of being.” Clearly, this is admittedly to merge method and content, if not to fuse them. Incidentally, it is argued (Muller, PRRD, I, 27) that “The Reformation is incomplete without its confessional and doctrinal codification. What is more, Protestantism could not have survived (*sic!*) if it had not developed, in the era of orthodoxy, a normative and defensible body of doctrine consisting of a confessional foundation and systematic elaboration.” The rub, of course, is that the codification in view is of the typical scholastic kind as an *offspring of Medieval scholasticism*. At any rate, this claim must get our further attention yet.

¹⁴¹ Once again, Fesko, RA, 53-56.

¹⁴² See the Foreword by Carl Trueman in Samuel Renihan, ed, *God without Passions* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015), 16, “It is no coincidence that the Reformed of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did very little to revise or alter the doctrine of God which they inherited from the late Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in particular, provided sources of understanding the being of God and his relationship to his creatures which were capable of sustaining orthodox Christian faith and life. No alternative models since have proved as durable or effective. That is why Chapter 2 of both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Second London Confession both univocally affirm the late medieval doctrine of God-after all it is the biblical doctrine of God.” In short, we are told that Thomas Aquinas (together with Duns Scotus) has once and for all cemented the Reformation Doctrine of God’s immutability. This “heaven” is also present in Charles J. Rennie, “Analogy and the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility” and “A Theology of the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility: II. Impassibility and the Divine Affections,” in CIG, 47ff, and 305ff, respectively. Let me hasten to add, if this is even needed, that all this by no means rejects the doctrines that the authors in this volume properly seek to set forth and stoutly defend. The immutability and impassibility of God are historical landmark doctrines that do and must stand like a rock. But all this may raise some questions. Should these doctrines be allowed to be “contaminated” and “diseased” by an unbiblical and unacceptable apologetic defense that guts them in their essence and proportionately any action required by it? Should not such defense be challenged? Whatever pluses scholasticism as an academic method may bring to the table, is the Siren Song of an Aristotle-infested Medieval scholasticism, as this is embodied in Aquinas, less dangerous than that of the Kant-infested anti-scholasticism, as this is embodied in Barth? More about these two much celebrated icons below. But for now, both seek to use an empty and deceitful philosophy as their trusted “handmaiden.” Hence these questions are fully justified. After all, in each instance they ultimately opt for an apostate, and therefore not so trustworthy “handmaiden” that, and here is the rub, would have destroyed Biblical Christianity, if it had been able to succeed in its stated objective of giving an ironclad and unassailable accounting of everything. This applies to Aristotle as well as to Immanuel Kant. Whatever common grace insights may be on display in their philosophical edifices, apologetically their ultimate objective is to produce what Paul designates as an “empty deception.” After all, and once again, if either one had been successful of making a *compelling* case, the God and Christianity of Scripture would have been a metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical impossibility! This must cause the Church, just as it did Paul, to take up its God-given weapons with the explicit aim to “tear down their futile speculations” which double as (Satan’s) “strongholds against the knowledge of God” in a fight to the death (2 Cor. 10:4-5; 11:3). Candidly, there is no indication in Medieval or Orthodox Reformed scholasticism up till today that this is even understood to the least degree. If it is, it certainly has never been (clearly) published to my knowledge. Besides, to herald either Aristotle or Kant without giving any thought of their eternal destiny facing the Almighty as a “consuming fire” (Hebr. 12:19), with nothing else to show for than a universally rejected system (Read: “stronghold”) of a virulent counter-Christ philosophy (Col. 2:8) may well be unconscionable! Whenever philosophers, or thinkers in any discipline, insist whether consciously or not, that their “field of labor” is

Apparently based upon, and at least not slowed down, by the acceptance of Aquinas as basically a *method*-scholastic, the first of the two publications (Fesko's) puts him virtually throughout in a favorable light, *method* as well as *content*-wise.¹⁴³ There is no hint in it that Aquinas could even be susceptible to a deadly philosophical infection. However, the question arises whether Aquinas opened himself up to this in the light of the following quotation from his *magnum opus*, in which he systematized his theological thinking (*Summa Theologiae*, Qu 1, A1)? "Now Scripture, inspired by God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore, it is useful that besides philosophical science there should be another knowledge, i.e., inspired by God. I answer that it was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge of God revealed besides philosophical science built by human reason. Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy."

This quotation has been judged in two ways, definitely "thumbs up" and just as definitely "thumbs down." The "thumbs up" interpretation is adamant that Aquinas emphasizes the indisputable need for a "discipline beyond philosophy," a discipline that "exceeds rational comprehension" and is instructed by "divine revelation." This comports with his admission that philosophical considerations "are bound to be error-full, although he never spells out these errors."¹⁴⁴ In short, "The limitations of philosophy, despite its importance for manifesting revelation, require theology," rooted in the revelation from God who is beyond human rationality.¹⁴⁵ The first of the two publications under consideration in the present context (Fesko's) supports this favorable and positive interpretation. It appreciates that according to Aquinas so-called "speculative" philosophical considerations that deal with the essence of "God's relationship to God's self,"¹⁴⁶ which also covers his simplicity and his immutability, are always undergirded, bracketed, supervised, guided, directed and (possibly) trumped by the "sacred doctrine" that is revealed in Scripture. So, the often-repeated charge that Aquinas holds to a so-called "natural theology" that lays the foundation for "revealed theology" must be dismissed as untenable. Aquinas supports or facilitates nothing of the sort.¹⁴⁷

restricted to the arena of the mind only, this does not even come into their line of vision! Is this the reason why Christian Institutions of Higher Learning inevitably first forfeit and then lose their birthright? See for this James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), esp. 819-851.

¹⁴³ See Fesko, 5, 6, 15, 25, 30, 32-36, 41, 48, 50, 54-58, 63-65, 68, 71-81, 83-96, 143, 148-149, 152-154, 164, 175-176, 206, 214, for his repeatedly favorable assessment of Aquinas.

¹⁴⁴ Long, PSTG, 8, 9, 42, 71, 89, 114.

¹⁴⁵ Long, PSTG, 6-8.

¹⁴⁶ Long, PSTG, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Fesko, RA, 6, 72, 74-75, 95-96; see also, Long, PSTG, 7-8. Incidentally, Fesko, RA, 143ff and 167ff, strongly criticizes both Van Til and Dooyeweerd for claiming that Aquinas seeks to place "revealed" theology on the foundation of "natural theology." This, however, seems definitely "a case of mistaken identity" in the case Dooyeweerd and those who espouse his type of philosophy. Their "beef" is that one can conclude to "a growing tension between the (admittedly!) ultimate and enduring submission to the authority (of Scripture and *patres*) and the tendency to support, verify, and clarify 'the faith' through dialectic distinctions and disputations in which the confrontation of the several views via the summation and balancing of rational arguments 'the one solution' is dismissed and 'the other' carries the day, based upon the adduced grounds." Against the background of this "tension it is important (imperative?) to inquire into the admissibility of this dialectic, its range, its boundaries, and its procedures (what determines what may function as a decisive argument?). See for this quotation, Prof. Dr. J. Van der Hoeven, "Kierkegaard en Marx als Dialectische Citici van Hegel," in *Philosophia Reformata* (Vol. 34, 1969), 89.

On the other hand, the unfavorable and negative “thumbs down” interpretation asserts that despite its insistence upon the primacy of sacred doctrine it not only promotes *in principle* two independent systems of knowledge and knowledge acquisition. It also sets in concrete the supposed reality of “unaided reason” that *in practice* does not require either Divine revelation or Divine illumination to participate in truth to whatever degree this may be the case. The truth value of this assessment is said to be borne out by the observable fact that “neither Catholics nor Protestants were troubled that “pagan” philosophers (also) argued (independently) for simplicity.”¹⁴⁸ After all, there was widespread agreement that philosophers, such as “Plato and Aristotle” were God’s “organs and instruments” and produced “most beautiful” teachings and that “simplicity” (together with immutability) was one of them.¹⁴⁹ This is *content* dependence with a vengeance! In short, the position that one can arrive at “simplicity” in lock step with ancient philosophy “is clear-cut evidence of the use of a natural theology” that somehow does and can stand on its own two feet, even if it is not foundational to “revealed” theology. The claim is that in a case that involved John Owen, he validly could and did avail himself of “pagan wisdom” to hold off a “supposed Reforming theologian” who went for “a radical revision of the perfectly simple Triune God.”¹⁵⁰ Vatican I may have clinched the propriety of this assessment, when it ascribed a full-fledged (maximal) “natural theology” stance to Aquinas.¹⁵¹ It most likely overlooked that Thomas positioned his philosophical reasoning under the aegis of Scriptural truth and ecclesiastical tradition. But it pegged properly that somehow it could independently arrive at (some) Biblical truth and in this way would (be necessary to?) solidify it.¹⁵²

Their questioning pertains to the apparent juxtaposition of Scripture/Tradition and the type of philosophical/rational argumentation.

¹⁴⁸ It may well be underscored by the second (incontrovertible) fact that Medieval scholastics to a man held to the essential trustworthiness of the thinking process. Procedural errors are only made on occasion. There is not a trace of the radical and total corruption that also inheres human reason on the horizon of their philosophical theologizing. So, Reformed scholastics, beware!

¹⁴⁹ Muller, PRRD, I, 276, touches on this as well.

¹⁵⁰ Long, PSTG, 145-146, 167-168.

¹⁵¹ See Long, PSTG, 5, 18, 376.

¹⁵² That Aquinas in his theological edifice made room for a built-in knowledge acquisition apart from Scripture is also the decided interpretation of Wolterstorff, IG, 8, “Aquinas ... held that philosophical reasoning and Scriptural claim converge on the point (of Divine immutability). So, though it would be misleading to characterize Aquinas’ reflections on divine immutability as philosophical reflections on the biblical claim that God is immutable, it would also not be correct to say that the role of Scripture in his reflections on immutability was merely to set boundaries to his conclusions. He had *independent* (italics, mine!) philosophical (Aristotelian!) reasons for holding that God is immutable; but he would have insisted that his reflections do not merely cohere with Scripture but are a philosophical articulation of Scripture’s claim that God is immutable.” Aquinas clearly wants to have his cake and eat it too. This is totally overlooked (or ignored?) by Fesko, and by all who adopt and fight for a Thomist scholasticism, at times as the final word in things doctrinal, if not their ultimate rescue! Storig, *Geschiedenis van de Filosofie*, I, 245-246, 262, weighs in on this as well. According to Aquinas, God’s wisdom ensures that the total range of his truth is a revelational given. This serves as an unshakable starting point. At the same time, there are truths that can be established by the intellect on and by itself, such as the existence of God and Monotheism. Further, a critique of the Christian faith that arises from intellectual considerations must collide with the highest thought principles of the intellect and therefore can be refuted by the intellect. While this does not and cannot come down to a definitive proof of the truths of faith, the intellect can independently show, using the handmaiden of philosophical considerations, that the Christian faith is not false, by dismantling any charges against it (See for this also, Brown and Flores, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 275-276). Of course, the resultant knowledge is imperfect since it is, by definition, both analogical and composite. God’s perfect and simple being cannot be grasped, let alone all at once. It is interesting to

All in all, it seems to me that each interpretation hits upon an unmistakable truth. Thomistic scholasticism can justifiably claim to operate within the parameters of Scripture and under the umbrella of Scripture.¹⁵³ But it does not close the door to the infiltration of independent conceptual (Platonic, Aristotelian, and Plotinian) constructs that may not be able or were not able to stand the light of day.¹⁵⁴ Just like rehabbing in a hospital-sanctioned facility following the instruction of a medical doctor under the generally watchful of a nurse does not always guarantee the choice of the proper machines in the proper way! Or like the use of a prescribed blood thinner after a TIA in an Emergency Room following a quick brain scan is not necessarily the appropriate answer. In fact, it could be deadly when a subsequent and more precise MRI would explicitly countermand such procedure.

In a word, Aquinas is clearly not out of the woods! He ultimately did not grasp that identical terminology, such as immutability and simplicity, did not imply identical substance.¹⁵⁵ At the least, he does not issue a warning in this context. In all candor, philosophical and biblical substance are not even in the same ballpark. Once, with the initial Bavinck, the difference is understood, it will dawn on us that even in this terminology the war between Satan and the seed of the woman, instigated by God, is in crystal clear evidence. Philosophical (Aristotelian) immutability is and must be on a war path against Biblical Immutability, regardless the same “sound.” The former is not only diametrically different from the latter (Bavinck). It seeks to destroy it. In fact, it *does* destroy it, if its existence can be compellingly demonstrated. The philosophical “godhead,” whether the Abstract Universal or the Abstract Particular hates the Triune God of Heaven and Earth and seeks to do away with him. An impersonal “it” that is “empty and deceitful” will forever fail to eradicate the awesome Personal “HIM” who is “brimful with the promise of life!”¹⁵⁶

Turning now to the second publication, together with a companion volume it distinctly follows in the footsteps of, if not celebrates the Medieval and the later Reformation Thomistic content-scholasticism.¹⁵⁷ In taking this route “it aims at (furnishing) a *better* (italics, mine !?) understanding of what the Scriptures say about God.”¹⁵⁸ The author of this sentence appears to be unaware that this statement harbors an implicit indictment of Holy Writ. At any rate, let us look at his so-called “better” argument to determine its “quality.”

note that “the Thomist intertwining of philosophy and theology, in which the sole function of philosophy was to be subservient to the agenda of the latter, had two consequences. Philosophy suffered from far-reaching scholastic truncation and faith from far-reaching scholastic rationalization. Eventually Duns Scotus liberated Philosophy and the Reformation unchained the powers of faith!

¹⁵³ See also Fesko, RA, 75-77, 152, 154.

¹⁵⁴ Fesko, RA, 154, may be hinting at this when he intimates that “there is room to improve upon Aquinas’s formulation.” But he does not pursue this any further.

¹⁵⁵ This runs totally counter to the Reformation teaching as formulated by Frame, “Unregenerate knowledge of God needs more than supplementation. It needs a radical reorientation” (quoted in Beeker, RDST, I, 219). In fact, from my perspective, it stands in needs of a “re-constitution!”

¹⁵⁶ Occasionally, it may seem that Aristotle’s “God” is personal, see *Metaphysics*, XII, 7. But attributing “pure actuality” to “him” as “an immovable mover,” and identifying “him” as “impassive,” “indivisible,” in fact, as “thinking of thinking” solidifies the conclusion that there is nothing personal to his “godhead.”

¹⁵⁷ Charles J. Rennie, “Analogy and the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility” and “A Theology of the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility: II. Impassibility and the Divine Affections,” in CIG, 47-80, and 305-336 respectively. See also its companion volume, GWP, 21-39.

¹⁵⁸ Baines, CIG, 67.

First, its “thinking theological mind”¹⁵⁹ seeks to make fruitful use of the “concepts of act and potency,” as found in both Aristotle and Aquinas,¹⁶⁰ in its defense of the equivocal Being of God, and therewith of divine perfections, such as impassibility and immutability.¹⁶¹ “The pure actuality of God underscores the decisive distinction between the Creator (who is pure act) and the creature (who is composed of act and potency).”¹⁶² After all, “potency and act are a complete division of being” (Aquinas).¹⁶³

Second, it makes copious use of “the analogy of being.”¹⁶⁴ It points out the “general consensus among the early and late Reformed orthodox regarding the doctrine of analogy, or analogical predication, understood predominantly from a Thomist perspective which resisted the notion of a core of univocity in the language of predication with regard to God and creatures.”¹⁶⁵

Third, it is adamant in the rejection of univocity. To adopt a univocal core is to turn “the infinite God into nothing more than a greater version of ourselves, a god in our image.”¹⁶⁶ The rejection of univocity applies to God’s being as well as to all his attributes, such as his life, his love, his goodness, etc., etc. “The mode of God’s being (and attributes) and the mode of the creature’s being (and attributes) differ ... *quidditatively*, being utterly different in essence,” with reference to Is. 46:5 and similar passages.¹⁶⁷

Fourth, it is equally adamant in rejection “equivocity.” After all, not only did God put creation on the map, he also created man in his image. Hence there is a metaphysical “relatedness” both ways.

Fifth, it hones in on this “relatedness” by choosing the concept of “analogy” as “the midpoint” between “univocity” and “equivocity.” It is a rather “shaky” midpoint since it is undefinable. It is also a midpoint “of sorts” only, since it comes with the caveat that “what God is *not* is clearer than what he is”¹⁶⁸ (with explicit reference to Aquinas), and further that “the dissimilarities are greater than the similarities.”¹⁶⁹

Sixth, it accounts for “the similarities and the dissimilarities” by turning to the “three ways of knowing God,” the *via causalitatis*, the *via negativa*, and the *via eminentiae*. In short, “The way of causation understands that a cause can be known in some manner from its effects.” “The way of negation removes from God the imperfections known from creatures.” “The way of eminence attributes eminently to God all of the perfections known from the creatures.” Jointly “the three ways” predicate that there is no common genus between the being and attributes of God and those of his creatures, and further that God is infinitely

¹⁵⁹ Baines, CIG, 49.

¹⁶⁰ Baines, CIG, 51.

¹⁶¹ This comes with reference to Ex. 3:14, “I am who I am.” There is a virtual consensus, even among Reformed theologians, that the *tetragrammaton* JHWH aims to convey the pure, exalted and sovereign “Being” of God, and with it his unquestionable and awe-inspiring aseity. In fact, this reference has been touted as the single most reason why the Being-Theology that had appeared on the scene was accepted, if not applauded as biblically sound and much-needed. Several voices have been raised against this interpretation. But more about this below!

¹⁶² Baines, CIG, 53.

¹⁶³ Baines, CIG, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Baines, CIG, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Baines, CIG, 56. More below about the way the concept of analogy in Aquinas ought to be interpreted. This has become somewhat controversial.

¹⁶⁶ Baines, CIG, 59.

¹⁶⁷ Baines, CIG, 63.

¹⁶⁸ Baines, CIG, 66

¹⁶⁹ Baines, CIG, 74, 76.

greater than his creation, infinitely past his creatures, and infinitely beyond what his creatures can conceive him to be.¹⁷⁰ Further, only when pursued “jointly” (balancing the *via eminentiae* with the *via negativa*) can we escape the trap of affirming God “as “nothing more than a beneficent creature, ‘writ large.’”¹⁷¹

Seventh, all this said, however, this publication takes great pain to point out that this aggregate of constructs stands in need of (more than) a few reminders.

1. Pertaining to all this in general, “philosophy is not used to establish faith, but as a tool for faith as it seeks understanding.”¹⁷² Hence all this is not “natural theology” as a necessary foundation of “revealed theology.”

2. Pertaining to the Act-Potency argument, “we may rest assured that it was not imposed upon the Scriptures, but rather introduced as handmaiden to help the church better understand, what it had already believed on the authority of Scripture alone.” Insistence upon God as “Pure Actuality” is said to be in line with Ex. 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM” (See also Ps. 102:25-27).¹⁷³

3. Pertaining to analogical language, whether “formal” (man’s love is similar to God’s love) or figurative (God’s hand signifies his power), “it would be a mistake to assume that it is meaningless.”¹⁷⁴

4. Pertaining to the “three ways” of knowing God, “they do not in any way detract from the necessity of special revelation.”¹⁷⁵ In fact, they “enable us to get a greater knowledge of God, not in such a way that it explains away mystery, but rather enables us to apprehend the mystery itself more fully. Such knowledge is not comprehensive, but it is sufficient.”¹⁷⁶ All this comes down to “a modest attempt to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, so as to tightly divide the Word of truth.”¹⁷⁷

In short, “All we say of God is grounded in Divine causality, seeks to remove creaturely imperfections from him and intends to affirm unlimited perfection.”¹⁷⁸ As such, God is “higher than all height, deeper than all depth, lighter than all light, brighter than all brightness, stronger than all strength, more virtuous than all virtue, fairer than all fairness, truer than all truth, greater than all greatness, mightier than all might, richer than all riches, wiser than all wisdom, more liberal than all liberality, better than all goodness, more just than all justice, and gentler than all gentleness” (So, Dodd), “infinitely elevated above the excellencies of creatures, infinitely superior to whatsoever we conceive as perfect in the notion of a created spirit, infinite Wisdom, infinite Goodness ...infinitely more excelling than the beauty of all creatures ... Whatever conception comes into your minds, say, This is not God, for God is incomprehensibly above whatsoever I can say, whatsoever I can think and conceive of him” (So, Owen).¹⁷⁹

Of course, the force with which God’s transcendence is extolled is admirable and heartwarming. But a threefold provisional comment is in place.

¹⁷⁰ Baines, CIG, 77

¹⁷¹ Baines, CIG, 327.

¹⁷² Baines, CIG, 48.

¹⁷³ Baines, CIG, 51, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Baines, CIG, 64.

¹⁷⁵ Baines, CIG, 71.

¹⁷⁶ Baines, CIG, 75.

¹⁷⁷ Baines, CIG, 76.

¹⁷⁸ Baines, CIG, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Baines, CIG, 79-80.

First, with Scripture so rich and compelling in its emphasis upon the transcendence of God, do we really need the threefold *via* to come to that conclusion?¹⁸⁰ This question assumes urgency when it is recognized that “Reformed theologians” became suspicious of the kind of “speculative theology” that “followed a way from creatures to God by removing inappropriate characteristics (*via negativa*), abstracting from them and through the way of eminence (*via eminentiae*) and perfection daring to make affirmations about God in himself based also upon the names revealed in Scripture” and ended up with “unjustified knowledge.” Instead they essentially opted to reason from the top down. “What can be known of God is primarily, if not solely through God’s (causal) relation to creation,” apparently as this is revealed in Scripture. Thus (without turning univocal) it “loses its analogical shape.”¹⁸¹

Second, why the caveat that philosophy does not establish faith, that it is merely a handmaiden, that analogical language does not rob Scripture of its meaning, and that the image of God spells relatedness? Is there more than meets the eye? Does the author “protest” too much? Does he, consciously or not, seek to prevent or undo the inescapable damage, connected with a philosophically contrastive view, by giving some positive theological assurances?

Third, should the conclusion that the threefold *via* does not allow any informative concept-formation about God or his attributes (all protestations to the contrary) raise any red flags?

All this now does and must get our attention, first in a preliminary look and in a provisional assessment. The concluding assessment will have to wait until we have heard from several recent thinkers who question Divine Immutability in whole or in part. They either insist that God is both essentially and operationally mutable or they hold that he is at least operationally mutable, even if he is essentially immutable.

By way of conclusion of the present section, Bavinck slightly opened the philosophical door more than likely against his basic instinct and conviction in which he unswervingly held to the Scriptures as the *sole* and sufficient *principium cognoscendi*. Hence, little, no, or hardly any mention of the archetypal-ectypal distinction, of the analogy concept, and the three *viae*. He has this in common with Martin and Phelps who fulminated against the earlier mentioned Scylla of constructing essentially an unbridgeable gap between God and his creation, and Beeke who with Bavinck fought the scourge of falling victim to the Charybdis of denying the existence of any gap. All four authors honored the mysterious complementarity of truth in a child-like fashion, without necessarily mentioning this explicitly. Hence, they were unwilling to go the theo-ontological route that seeks mentally to synthesize the two poles while clearly

¹⁸⁰ Bavinck, RD, II, 128-131, is not averse to go the “*viae*” route. “It can be taken with safety.” But he *first* wishes us to “recognize that the knowledge of God’s attributes existed long before these three ways had been conceived, and hence that they were born much later from reflection on attributes already well known and described.” Frankly, the *viae* are part and parcel of a philosophical abstraction theo-ontology. Ending up with “*essentially* unknowable and undefinable” attributes, these *viae* may not be as safe as Bavinck surmised. So why take a route that is apparently not needed and is suspect to boot? The more I realize that these *viae* are taken to illuminate, solidify and ground biblical truth, the more it dawns on me how far removed it is from the contours and essence Paul’s Gospel apologetics. He goes after unbelievers and believers alike with the Gospel of the Cross and the Resurrection and therefore is poles apart from an all too human “wisdom.” Further he does so with a view to repentance. Not a hint that he builds up a case unto mental agreement! In this context it is interesting to note that Bavinck, II, 219, endorses Cremer’s assessment that “holiness does not first of all denote a relation from that which is below to that which is above, but vice versa; it applies first of all to God, and subsequently in a derivative sense, also to creatures.”

¹⁸¹ Long, PSTG, 168.

lodging them harmoniously and peacefully in their regenerate hearts which yielded them cognitive, volitional, and emotional rest. In this they conscientiously, fully, and humbly honored Deuteronomy 29:29a in their gloriously displayed and utterly necessary fear of God. This said, however, none of the four combined this with a fiery explicit plea equally to pursue the “ethics” of God as a matter of life and death, thus honoring Deuteronomy 29:29b as this finds its culmination point in the majestic triadic Grand Command of God the Son who has all the authority in heaven and on earth and vows his permanent presence in that capacity with all those who make this their indisputable priority, if not their all-overarching and avowed objective, making everyone and everything else subservient to this, thus mirroring their Commander-in-Chief.

Under the prevailing influence of Aquinas Reformed orthodoxy, while fully committed to the Reformation, adopted a scholasticism that needs to be analyzed and assessed. However, one thing has become quite clear, it is no longer possible to maintain that Post-Reformation orthodoxy merely adopted a “neutral” methodology. The bottom-up approach that has its apostate roots in Platonic/Aristotelian/Plotinian philosophy which via Dionysius was unreservedly adopted by Aquinas, cannot possibly be harmonized with the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation, indisputably found its way into the scholasticism of Reformed orthodoxy until the present. Thus, it embraced not only a *method*-scholasticism, but also a *content*-scholasticism. Copious use of the archetype-ectype distinction, of the analogy concept, and of the three *viae* incontrovertibly demonstrates this. This simply must be taken into account in the next section. What also must be taken into account is an equally incontrovertible fact. A concerted insistence upon the obedient pursuit of the first prong of Christ’s Grand Command is just as much absent in their publications as in the four authors mentioned above. In Muller’s terminology, even if Reformed orthodoxy may have done a yeoman job in institutionalizing the Protestant Church, codifying a complete system of doctrine, both positively systematic and polemically apologetic, and professionalizing the latter technically in the university setting, so as to give all this a recognizable, permanent, and unassailable presence,¹⁸² there is a glaring vacuum. A near-exclusive emphasis upon the third prong of the Grand Command, while overlooking, ignoring, or even neglecting the first one, is seeking to solidify a super-structure without providing it with the indispensably necessary infra-structure. Without “the earlier,” “the later” is bound to run out of steam.

It is utterly depressing to notice how those imposing Christian Cathedrals in Western Europe, on the Continent as well as in the UK, built at times over the course of centuries to house huge crowds to the glory of God, now stand virtually empty, turn into Concert Halls or Places for Organ Recitals, or are at best “guarded” by a group of septuagenarians or octogenarians. All this, while “next door” Islamic Mosques, Hindu Temples, Buddhist Shrines, etc., are bursting with people! All chickens, whether of commission or omission are sooner or later coming home to roost! To respond to this in a “ho-hum” attitude, or even to ascribe all this to “Providence,” may this show that “the kiss of death” has come closer than is recognized? Despite possibly impressive scholarly contributions to the exposition of Biblical truth, why the failure to go beyond addressing “the choir,” if not “the choirmaster” only to settle the “score,” rather than aiming at and ending up with a “performance?” Could it be that a *theo-ontological mind-set*, by definition, would be incapable of “grasping” concrete realities that should make all Christians weep and galvanize them to pursue the God-mandated action? At any rate, this brings us inevitably to the necessary analysis and

¹⁸² Muller, PRRD, I, 33.

assessment of Aquinas and the sources of his thinking. After all, he is both regarded and applauded as a kind of “mother lode” for and of Reformed orthodoxy.

V. The Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas (I)

The purpose of this section is not to give a “global” overview of the thinking of Aquinas, even if that were ever possible in the first place. The proportion of his oeuvre is so extensive and the intricacy of his arguments at times so complex that it would defy any effort to be successful. No, my limited scope is to determine whether the “philosophy” that he adopted as his flagbearer, admittedly a “mixed breed,” did or would entice him to enter the “secrets” (“essence”) of God and so, for a starter, prevent him, time-wise, energy-wise or for any other reason, from giving his full, or even any or enough attention to the content and the pursuit of what God commands (“ethics”), as this is summarized in Christ’s Grand Triple Command! That a “guilty” verdict, in whole or in part, would have implications for the Thomist-inspired scholasticism of the Reformed orthodox as well, and could adversely impact one’s appreciation for it, would virtually go without saying.

Let me begin with the question whether in Aquinas his “philosophy” trumps his “theology,” or vice versa, whether his “theology” controls and shapes his “philosophy.” In short, does his philosophy, introduced as a facilitating “handmaiden” to theology, indeed function as one, ever or fully retaining its servant-status? Or does it usurp the prerogatives of a “mistress,” taking theology where it would not or should not go? This has been hotly (?) debated.¹⁸³ All commentators agree that Aquinas is a theologian first and foremost. However, some hold that his philosophy is inferior and hardly worth mentioning, others that his philosophy is top of the line, ranks with the elite, and is more than worthy of consideration. It may be that the following assessment strikes a balance and mirrors a widely held consensus. Thomas Aquinas is a “paradigmatic *Christian* philosopher-theologian.” He starts with “the articles of faith,” gleaned from Scripture and Tradition (*Christian*), and welcomes the authority of extant thinkers of whatever stripe, whether Greek, Arab or Jewish, illumined by the light of nature, utilizing them as valued co-workers in the vast project of clarifying and supporting by means of rational analysis and argumentation” (philosophy) what already has been firmly established as “revealed doctrine” (theology).¹⁸⁴ In short, while combining “the light of reason and the light of faith,” Aquinas is a “theologian by

¹⁸³ See for this, a. o. Joseph P. Wawrykow, *Thomas Aquinas* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 109-110; Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP 242-243, 262.

¹⁸⁴ See Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, “Introduction,” in CCA, 9. See for this also, Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, “Introduction,” in OHA, 4. Mark D. Jordan, “*Theology and Philosophy*,” in CCA, 248, is in the same ballpark when he, assessing Aquinas, speaks about his “theology’s transforming incorporation of philosophy” and about his ideal that “Christian theology ought to speak more and better things about matters of concern to philosophy than the philosophers themselves can say.” Joseph Owens, “Aristotle and Aquinas,” in CCA, 38-59, esp. 57-58, is apparently not so sure that the “water” of Aristotle’s philosophy turns into theological “wine,” or is even helpfully mixed with a larger amount of such “wine,” when adopted by Aquinas, the philosopher, however much this may have been the wish of Aquinas the theologian. Apparently, Owens himself is of the opinion that “water” should stay “water” and “wine” “wine” to do justice to the genius of both Aristotle and Aquinas (See for these metaphors also Wawrykow, *Thomas Aquinas*, 110). At any rate, it is evident that the jury is not fully out. Of course, there are three rather than two possibilities. Positively, the philosophical “water” is favorably transformed by the theological “wine,” to whatever extent. Neutrally, the “water” stays “water” and the “wine” “wine.” Or negatively, the “wine” becomes rather “watery,” if it does not turn fully into “water.” The latter was apparently Bonaventure’s concern!

profession,” and is committed to the primacy of the first (Christian) and third (theology) prongs in as much as these, be it rationally, not only utilize promising existing philosophies, but also streamline and modify them, and at times sanitize what is or may be defective in them.¹⁸⁵ So, his aim is scholastically (that is, rationally) to construct a Christian Theology with the much-needed assistance of an existing, a Christianized or a Christianly-to-be-shaped philosophy whenever or wherever the latter was called for.¹⁸⁶ Well, what follows should determine whether, or to what extent, this consensus can stand the light of day, or more precisely, whether the “handmaiden” serves a “benign”/“semi-benign” function or has a “malignant”/“semi-malignant” influence.

In a recent well-documented and carefully argued publication an erudite Aquinas interpreter is upbeat about him and strongly denies any type of infestation by a so-called controlling Greek philosophy that would put him in the dock.¹⁸⁷ So, let us listen to his (lengthy) argument. We are told that in his *magnum opus*, his *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 1-43, Aquinas expounds his “speculative” theology.¹⁸⁸ This is the theology that (1) covers “God’s essence, including his Triune relations,” “The mystery of God’s essence and persons,” “God, possessing knowledge solely of, in, and through the species of his own essence,” and (2) asks questions, such as, “Who is God, in God’s self,” “What is God’s relationship to God’s self,” “What does God know about himself,” “What is the way in which God knows and relates to himself as well as to others than himself.”¹⁸⁹ All this, not so incidentally, is in distinction to his “practical theology” that covers (1) “God’s relationship to creatures” as well as (2) “the creatures’ relationship to God.” “Speculative theology” and these two components of “practical theology” make up “sacred doctrine.” Speculative theology is wisdom in the highest sense, not accessible directly, but only as it is knowable from God’s manifestation in creation (Rom. 1:19) and his communication through revelation. In short, it is through the creature’s relationship to God, by means of, if not based upon his manifestation and revelation, that this theology does and apparently must become a reality. This is to say, Aquinas reasons from created *effect* to Creating *Cause*, from the bottom up.¹⁹⁰ This is evident

¹⁸⁵ See Jan A. Aertsen, “Aquinas, philosophy in its historical setting,” in CCA, 34-35.

¹⁸⁶ Aquinas wrote his *Summa Theologiae* (ST) rationally to bolster the faith of his students who wished to enter the Church’s pastoral ministry. He penned his *Summa contra Gentiles* (ScG) at the request of missionaries in Spain to provide them with rational firepower in their apologetic labors among the Muslims.

¹⁸⁷ Long, PSTG, throughout.

¹⁸⁸ For the summary that follows below, see, PSTG, 3-62, 68, esp. 9-11, 30-31, 68.

¹⁸⁹ This shows that “speculative” in this context is a stipulated (well-known) definition, and stands for “academic,” rather than “conjectural.” So, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI, 1. Aquinas “drew on Aristotle’s distinction between speculative and practical knowledge” (Long, PSTG, 390).

¹⁹⁰ Brian Davies OP, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP, 244, argues that Aquinas “denies that human beings in this world have a direct and unmediated knowledge of God. On his account our knowledge of God starts (through sensory experience) from what we know of the world in which we live.” This makes the “bottom-up” approach mandatory. He also argues that according to Aquinas, this bottom-up approach is convincing in that (*Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 9) “he can demonstrate ... that ‘God exists’ and that God can be made known as we ‘proceed through demonstrative arguments’” *a la* Aristotle, that is, “arguments using premises which entail a given conclusion on pain of contradiction.” There is much to be said for this assessment. As mentioned already, Aquinas wrote his ScG at the request of missionaries among the Muslims. Not being Jews, he could not use the OT. Not being heretics, he could not use Scripture. So, he rationally drew arguments from God’s self-disclosure in Nature apart from Scripture, apparently convinced that his Aristotelian logic would be persuasive. However, Graham Oppy, “Arguments for the Existence of God,” in OHMP, 697, focusing on the first of his “Five Ways” in Aquinas, ST, regards it “quite implausible that this first Way is a cogent argument for the existence of God.” If it were, “it would have to defeat

from the three *viae* to reach out to God, the *via causalitatis*, the *via negativa* or *negationis* and the *via eminentiae*. It also shows up in his five-fold cosmological argument to illuminate the existence of God. Hence Immanuel Kant called the theology of Aquinas a cosmo-theology.¹⁹¹ This bottom-up approach will and must receive our detailed attention below.¹⁹²

naturalism.” It clearly has not succeeded in this. In fact, today “naturalism” rules the roost, academically and practically. At any rate, if Aquinas’ “five-fold argument” for the existence of God was (even) meant to function as “compelling proof,” which has been called in question, naturalism’s hegemony admittedly would expose this “argument” as a total, if not “disastrous” failure. Of course, any argument like that on Thomas’ part, whether presented as proof or not, does and would overlook (ignore?) the fact that any dismissal of God, naturalistic or otherwise, whether “benevolently” or “maliciously,” is rooted in the rebellious suppression of the human heart, which can only be “sanitized by the Gospel, starting with the need for and grace of a *heart transplant* in regeneration. The Semi-Pelagian Thomas Aquinas is simply not even in the ballpark in recognizing, let alone focusing on this. Neither, for that matter, is or can be “hard-core” Arminianism. No wonder that even “honorable” men, such as Norman Geisler, flock to the apologetics of Aquinas. The question may well (must!) be raised whether Reformed apologists who follow suit are in danger to forfeit their birthright, whether in whole or in part. Frankly, from scanning the field of apologetics it appears that all of today’s practitioners target “mental agreement,” rather than the heart in needs of repentance, overlooking (ignoring?) the model apologetics of Peter (Acts 2:38) and Paul (Acts 17:30), who, as we shall see, follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

¹⁹¹ For this, see Wolterstorff, IG, 8. For the widespread recognition of this *bottom-up* approach, see also Brian Davies OP, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP, 244-247; Jorge J. E. Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages: An Introduction,” in CPMA, 5; R. Wielockx, “Henry of Ghent,” in CPMA, 296-300; Gyula Klima, “Theory of Language,” in OHA, 384-385, “For Aquinas the predication of being of created substances is *epistemologically* prior to the predication of the being of God.” Since, therefore, “our mind is first confronted with the being of created substances, it has to arrive at the cognition of divine being in the more circuitous (bottom-up) way.” While the *mode* of the predication (*modus significandi*) of God’s being in terms of created being, such as wisdom, goodness, existence, is always “defective,” the *fact* of applying the absolute perfection contained in these terms to God is legitimate, because *he* is the predicated thing (*res significata*). All this with reference to Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 1, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2. co. In other words, for Aquinas the reality of the ontologically prior Summit (God) is an incontestable and unshakable fact. Hence the epistemological *ascent*, however “defective,” on the one hand, even if clearly “imperfect,” is and must be “perfectly” proper, on the other! For the bottom-up issue, see further, Aertsen, in CCA, 32, “The only knowledge of God that philosophers can attain is a knowledge based on God’s effects in this world.” Hence Aquinas’ “Five Ways!” These only do and can prove or suggest (?) that there is “a universal cause,” called God. Incidentally, philosophy can never give anything like an account of *what* God is. Hence it can never arrive at “a *vision* of God which is beyond man’s natural powers and capacities,” and so can never offer “a prospect of a fulfilment of human life.” In this context Aquinas uses “the pregnant word ‘distress’ (*angustia*) to characterize” the philosophical plight and its unavoidable shortfall (*Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 48)! Of course, the question arises, whether Aquinas curtails or even misdirects the “distress” of the very philosophical enterprise which Paul designates as “empty deceit.” Paul does not bemoan the *limits* of the philosophy of his day, but its very *nature*! Aquinas and Paul may have “the sound” in common, but not “the substance.” In actuality, the so-called “distress” of apostate philosophy, its limited scope, is the “glory” of Pauline theology (Rom. 11:33!). This suggests a further question. Would Paul ever have contemplated its use as a “handmaiden” to get his message across? I frankly doubt it!

¹⁹² For now, Aquinas decided to explore the contours and content of *God’s archetypal knowledge of himself*, of which he *admittedly* both principally and ultimately knows *nothing* from the vantage point, if not launching pad of *our ectypal knowledge of God*. Even if this knowledge is based on (revealed) Scripture and (ecclesiastical) tradition and both function as “authorities” within the scholastic method, the “nothing” stigma stays in place (Long, PSTG, 113; see for this Aquinas, ST, Introduction to I, Qu. 3; as well as see William P. Alston, “Substance and Trinity,” in Stephen T. Davis, *e. a.*, eds., *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 194). The questionable propriety of such bottom-up enterprise has been mentioned already. More about this below. But for now, this essentially vitiates the *Sola Scriptura* principle of the Reformation in three ways. It admittedly mixes Scripture with tradition. Thus, the sufficiency of Scripture is compromised. Further, it seeks to rise above Scripture. At the least it gives the impression that this is a “must” to arrive at the (ever-elusive) truth. This rankles with the “perfection” of Scripture. Finally, it uses philosophical considerations as a “handmaiden” to get 20-20 vision. As we will see, this will prove to cast a large shadow upon, if not to jeopardize the perspicuity of Scripture, which Aquinas, not so incidentally, denies, if not rejects.

But for now, this type of approach is admittedly Aristotelian to the core. Aristotle distinguishes two types of “demonstration.” The stronger form is “from cause to effect” (*demonstratio propter quid* -- on account of “what”) and yields a high degree of certainty. Once we know the “cause,” we can unpack the effects. The weaker form is from “effect to cause” (*demonstratio quia* – “because”). This is more tenuous but nevertheless proper since it seems incontestable that one can, in fact, must trace a cause from its effects. Since the “what-ness,” that is, the essence of God, is unknown and unknowable (the God-self is only known by God himself), Aquinas cannot take the “top down” demonstration path. Only the “bottom-up” way is at his disposal. But since all univocity is out, due to the absolute Creator-creature distinction, he can only climb “half-way up” at best since he is stuck on the analogical level and can never transcend it.¹⁹³ Still, he can point to the top, since somewhere

¹⁹³ See Long, PSTG, 46. This is a justifiable conclusion in as much as in the Middle Ages the “scholastics generally understood analogy as a middle ground between strict univocity where being would have the same meaning (*ratio*) in all its instances, and pure equivocity, in which its meanings would be totally disparate and unconnected.” “Analogy was thus seen to strike the balance needed to ensure, on the one hand that God transcends creatures, which univocity would disallow, and, on the other, that he is “naturally” knowable, which pure equivocity would make impossible.” So, Stephen D. Dumont, “John Duns Scotus,” in CPMA, 354. In a word, “the doctrine of analogy” is a “middle position.” See for this also the take of Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages: An Introduction,” in CPMA, 6-7. Some hold that the terms we predicate of God are (must be) used univocally (if we do not wish to make “God unknowable and the Scriptures unintelligible” and to avoid falling victim to skepticism). In a word, there is (must be) such a thing as “natural knowledge” (Duns Scotus). Others hold that such terms are (must be) used equivocally (in order not to imperil Divine Transcendence). God is “not part of this world” (Maimonides). Aquinas adopts “the middle position” between Scotus and Maimonides, *explicitly* “to prevent all our judgments about God being false,” which, of course, is a *theological* certainty and for that reason alone already stands like a rock and does not allow for any compromise in this matter. See for the place and function of “analogy” also Wayne J. Hankey, “Aquinas, Plato and Neoplatonism,” in OHA, 62; and the perceptive insight of Gyula Klima, “Theology of Language,” in OHA, 384, “Since we gain our primary concept of being from created substances, we need to understand divine being by analogically ‘stretching’ our mundane concept.” “All names which are imposed to signify some perfection absolutely are properly said of God, and they apply to him primarily as far as the thing signified (*res significata*) is concerned, although not as the mode of signifying (*modus significandi*) is concerned, such as “wisdom,” “goodness,” “essence” and the like” (*Super Sent*, lib. 1, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2. co). This is not double talk. It conveys that “the terminological disparity between the signification and the mode of signifying reflects the essential (contrastive) *disparity* (italics, mine) between the (divine) ontological order and the (human) epistemological order.” Frankly, this makes it much more serious than “double talk.” It ignores the incomprehensible nature of the complementarity of truth and seeks to make it intelligible. Thus, he appears (for now) to enter the “secrets” of God. Klima’s duplicate mention of the necessity of an analogical *stretching* procedure of mundane concepts in his article “Being,” in OHMP, 413, frankly gives the ballgame away. He essentially concedes that all analogical reasoning is a “stretch.” My metaphor, as per below, of its “climbing” of the Mt. Everest *without* ever “arriving” covers the same ground, be it more graphically and more explicitly and clearly. “Stretching” as a designating may still suggest that it can be successful. Since univocity is “out,” success is exclusively a “pipedream.” After all, go the analogy route and all language is DOA, despite “empty” verbal assurances to the contrary. As we shall see, Henry of Ghent made a gallant rescue effort and necessarily failed. Duns Scotus perceptively and correctly attached his R.I.P. to it. But his alternative did not and, as we shall see, does not make the grade either. Sarah Coakley, “‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity,” in Davis, TT, 139, weighs in on all this as well in a rather telling fashion. According to her, “A good rule-of-thumb definition of “analogy” is that it involves ‘stretch[ing] [a term] to fit new applications ... without generating for the native speaker an imaginative strain’ (with which we contrast the imaginative *frisson* of the newly coined metaphor.” She adds that we must settle “which way we are (doing the) ‘stretching.’” Either from God to man or from man to God. This is, either we “stretch” from what is in God originally to what is in man derivatively, such as “love.” Or we “stretch” from what is observed in man, such as once again “love,” and subsequently predicate this of God, what incidentally already has been done for centuries as a settled (or dead) conjunctive metaphor. The end-product is “clearly” a “blurred” predicament. Essentially, we are told not to experience the tension-filled gap that is undeniable. It is evident that the Medieval

the “upward” climb must arrive at an Uncaused Cause. Theologically, this is an incontestable given. Both Scripture and tradition are said to seal this! Further, philosophically a “sheer contingent” reality, and thereby a causal *regressio ad infinitum*, is advisedly “absurd” and therefore out by definition. But by whose definition? Clearly Aristotle’s. But it lacks compelling demonstration. So, it can hardly be persuasive. At any rate, only an Ultimate Cause can allegedly “render contingent beings intelligible,” and “that,” for Aquinas, “is God!”¹⁹⁴ Of course, “God” as revealed in Scripture and established in ecclesiastical tradition. In fact, as set in concrete by this tradition, since according to Aquinas Scripture is lacking in “perspicuity.”¹⁹⁵ At any rate, he simply (and suddenly) introduces, if not inserts here the very starting point of his (theological) theologizing, to which he was committed with heart and soul, and which he regarded as incontestable. But in his (philosophical) argumentation he did so without any syllogistic reasoning. Hence, it did come “out of the blue” and must have appeared that way to any astute observer!¹⁹⁶ That this did not cause a stir can be contributed to the fact that at that time everyone believed in the existence of God and must have accepted Aquinas’ suddenly inserted conclusion as a “no-brainer.”¹⁹⁷ How times have changed!

At any rate, regardless the merits or demerits of this approach at present, at this juncture two things should be crystal clear. Once Aquinas is in the Aristotelian mold, it stands to reason that he and his scholastic followers climb the upward ladder and do (must!) use philosophical considerations to that effect. But this is a go-stop-go-stop, a yes-but-yes-but affair. He seeks to argue Divine simplicity but must do so from a composite creaturely platform and in a composite human terminology that reflects this. Consequently, this terminology can never univocally apply to God. Simplicity excludes this. So, when he arrives at any conclusion about God, he immediately disqualifies it as “analogical” at best. Again, and again we hear of the “shortfall,” if not the “failure” of language. This concession could have been made as something inherent to all philosophical undertakings. But more likely that it comes with the “analogical” territory.¹⁹⁸ The essence of the perfectly simple God is

conundrum has lasted until today and will continue without abatement until the regenerate heart *forbids and prevents* the mind “to pry” into the incomprehensible “essence” of God, and in a fresh and refreshing manner transfers its time and energy, intellectually, volitionally, and emotionally to the active pursuit of the *Sola* and *Tota Scriptura* mandated “ethics” of God!

¹⁹⁴ For this, see Long, PSTG, 12-19, esp. 13-15.

¹⁹⁵ See Long, PSTG, 79.

¹⁹⁶ Frankly, the “God” claim is introduced as a so-called *Deus ex Machina*. It suddenly appears without any previous groundwork laid to make it compelling.

¹⁹⁷ This is confirmed by Aquinas himself, ST, I, q. 2, a. 3, “A thing that is moved cannot itself cause that same movement ... Of necessity anything moved is moved by something else ... Now we must stop somewhere otherwise there will be no first cause of the movement and as a result no subsequent causes ... Hence one is bound to arrive at some first cause of things being moved, which is not itself moved by anything and *this is what everybody understands by God* (italics, mine).”

¹⁹⁸ Long, PSTG, 79. See also Thomas Williams, “Describing God,” in Pasnau, CHMP, II, 758-760, “The essential feature of Aquinas’s theory of analogy is that a single term is predicated *per prius et per posterius*: of God in a prior way and of creatures in a posterior way.” “Some (undefinable) change of meaning or conceptual slippage or linguistic indirectness had to result from attempts to apply the (same) words and concepts (to God) by which we name and understand creatures – precisely because creatures are irreducibly distinct from God.” Seeking to narrow, if not close the undefinable gap, “Henry of Ghent holds that in analogical predication there are two (diverging), though closely related, concepts.” In this context he advocates a “con-fused” language concept. Note the hyphenation! Language, in fact, a plethora of words, is and may (“must?”) be applied to both God and man to convey a message, such as “being,”

and remains unknowable and indescribable! Still, alternating the “yes” and the “but” (really the “no”), he keeps on climbing ... and stopping ... and climbing, etc., etc., ... admittedly without ever “arriving.” His language is always “defective” by definition and perennially meets with defeat. Frankly, there is not even the slightest trace of “kinship” between this approach and Scripture, that is, at bottom, between Aquinas’ philosophically imperfect

“goodness,” etc., etc. “Our minds mistake these concepts as one.” However, when we analyze them, their “unity” shatters and they prove to be two concepts, “one predicable to God and the other predicable to creatures.” Only Divine illumination allows us to envision the concept of God, and in that light we grasp the concept of creatures, just like the original light behind a stained glass window allows us to see the shape and colors on the windows.” In this the “con” supposedly trumps the “gap” (For this, see Stephen Brown, “Walter Burley, Peter Aureoli, and Gregory of Rimini,” in RHMP, 377-378). It goes without saying that a mere illustration does not and cannot bridge the language gap. So, it is not surprising that Duns Scotus is “hostile to all this.” “Either we have the same concepts of God and creatures (he tells us), or we have no concepts of God at all, in which case it would be impossible to speak of God.” Ultimately, of course, Aquinas wishes to speak “meaningfully” about God, and must have believed that he did. Otherwise, he would have closed shop immediately. But the “analogy” road to arrive at “meaningful language” is far from a clearly compelling path, to put it mildly. Dionysius clearly put him in an inescapable (?) bind! Not so incidentally, according to Dumont, “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus,” in RHMP, 314, with his commitment to univocity “Scotus removes a pillar of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.” The latter stands and falls with his repeated statement of “Being always being equivocal.” After all, as we saw, the being of “Form” (universality) and the being of “Matter” (particularity) are contrastive and *never* meet! But the assessment or “admission” of this “removal” is far from benign! The consequent claim was that with Scotus’ elimination of the equivocity-pillar “the totality of medieval philosophy collapses.” The latter seeks to bridge the gap whether “from bottom to top” or “from top to bottom.” Scotus’ theory asserts that there is no (longer a) gap to be bridged! Quite apparently, the medieval scholastic enterprise as-a-whole is a tottering, if not reeling undertaking, far from the sturdy and enduring edifice that it is claimed and depicted to be. Dispense with one building block and everything disintegrates! Such is the appraisal of experts who have earned more than their spurs in the philosophical enterprise. Candidly, this may very well come as a surprise, if not a shock to theologians who are firmly entrenched in a supposedly rock-solid scholastic tradition. But this really should not be the case. Neither Aquinas, nor Henry of Ghent, nor Duns Scotus take their point of departure in the mysterious and incomprehensible complementarity of truth. Each, then, in his own way is determined to bridge a gap that is unbridgeable. To do so, Aquinas opts for “analogy.” Henry of Ghent for a “hybrid type of analogy” that inches its way to univocity, and Duns Scotus for straightforward “univocity.” All three, of course, while theologically (verbally) united in embracing the age-old truths of Divine transcendence and immanence as taught in Scripture and tradition, failed in reaching their synthesizing objective to make their relationship compellingly intelligible with their divergent philosophical reasoning. See for details, the next Footnote. But for now, it is sufficient to realize that these mutually hostile competing “bridges” produced a veritable scholastic quagmire and created a very shakable edifice to boot. Or even more precisely, these iconic “bridge builders” shared a quagmire from which they could not emerge because their products were either bridges from somewhere to nowhere (essentially, from Immanence to an ever-receding theological Transcendence, Aquinas, Henry of Ghent) or a non-needed bridge from nowhere to nowhere (essentially, from Immanence to a *philosophically* non-existing Transcendence, Scotus). Incidentally, Scotus’ simultaneous *ecclesiastical* commitment to a theological Transcendence, that is, in combination with a philosophical non-Transcendence may well have helped open the way for the Medieval commitment to the concept of a double truth in which both contrastive if not mutually exclusive components can be honored as equally compelling. If this “outcome” does not make us “despair” about the phenomenon of Medieval scholasticism as essentially a “dead-end street,” despite all its possible “incidental pluses,” which can be royally honored as such, most likely nothing will (See for the concept of “double truth,” Muller, PRRD, I, 279, 333, 382-386, 388, 404; III, 124. Frankly, there is no reason why the “prophetic” verdict, which is explained in greater detail below, namely, that Aquinas with his analogy concept endeavored “to penetrate into the essence of God” would not equally apply to Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, even if the latter two sought entrance through differing gateways. At any rate, in my concluding section, XII, A Pastoral Appeal, I intend to return to this “thorny” issue, how to honor God’s transcendence in full (versus Scotus) without losing the immanent face value of his predication (versus Aquinas). To take both seriously we must somehow transcend the analogy-univocity dilemma that has kept theology, whether scholastic or otherwise, imprisoned for too long. For the controversial issue how to “predicate” anything about the utterly transcendent God in immanent creaturely language, see also Muller’s extensive treatment of this conundrum, PRRD, III, 72, 74-75, 103, 114, 130, esp., 195-199, 201-204, 214, 226, 284-287, 562.

Scripture and Scripture as God's perfect Word. Whenever Aquinas endorses the latter theologically, he is at best "a house divided." Hardly a commendable reason to take up residence in such "facility."

Not so incidentally, Aquinas has this "futility" in common with all apostate thinkers who start out with a contrastive view of reality from the earliest philosophers and onward and subsequently seek to move heaven and earth to come up with an ever-eluding synthesis. In an essay in which an author questions the "Future of Continental Philosophy," he ends with a "grim" quote "with respect to the paradox of eventful (including philosophical) action (pursuing an action whose justification *must* be a self-fulfilling prophecy): '*You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on*' (italics, mine) ... To act at all, one must stop representing the past which will always bring one to a halt (*apparently a dead-end street*) and start acting out the future, hope against hope (*hope springs eternal, even admittedly unfounded hope*; comments in italics, mine)."¹⁹⁹

The Frenchman Camus (1913-1960) put it even more bluntly when he declares all of life, including, if not specifically "philosophical" life, *absurd* from top to bottom, referring to "the paradoxical situation between our impulse to ask ultimate questions and the impossibility of receiving an adequate answer." The upshot is "an endless Sisyphus cycle." "Humans cannot ask for ultimate meaning (philosophically or otherwise) only for their answers to tumble back down." All this adds up to "irresolvable emptiness." So, why should I not kill myself, as well as others, for that matter? The bottom line is "to live without escape and without consolation and to die unreconciled!" "Sisyphus reminds us that we cannot help seeking to understand the reality that transcends our intelligence, striving to grasp more than our limited and practical scientific (and philosophical understanding allows, and wishing to live without dying. Like Sisyphus we are our fate, and our frustration is our very life: we can never escape it. But there is more. After the rock comes tumbling down confirming the ultimate futility of his project, Sisyphus trudges after it once again ... He is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock." So, "no suicide" and "no killing field!" Even if neither is right or wrong." Instead, take ownership! Turn your "absurdity" into your "happiness." Here is a certain sleight of hands. From a philosophical recognition of abject absurdity via the heroic acceptance of tragedy turn to an artist's life of vitality, which includes a "normative stance, affirming specific values," which includes war against injustices, whether embodied in "tyranny," which should be self-restrained and "revolution" that should be self-limited. In it all, however, life is and remains ambivalent and frustrating, ambiguous and even contradictory.²⁰⁰ Clearly the fully recognized and acknowledged human state of affairs is anti-philosophically and emphatically declared to be "empty" from top to bottom. But what is tragically missing is the equally clear recognition and emphatic declaration that any and all solutions or responses, whether called "heroic" or otherwise, are and should be acknowledged as ultimately "deceptive," also from top to bottom. Of course, the "blind rebellion" (John 3:3, 5) of the "natural man" cannot possibly arrive at this conclusion.

Candidly, the reason for all these quotations in the present context is fourfold.

¹⁹⁹ John Mullarkey, "The Future of Continental Philosophy," in BCCP, 259-275, esp. 275. That hope, even if unfounded, tends to spring eternal may well come to expression in Herbert Marcuse who appears to hold that the self-negation of human reason in its prevailing restlessness is offset by the eternity of the Eros. Apparently, "something new" must always be beckoning beyond the horizon!

²⁰⁰ See Ronald Aronson, "Albert Camus," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2017), s. v. Albert Camus.

First, Camus may be the only one who understood that the whole History of Philosophy, metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically, was and is one absurd Sisyphus enterprise. So is, by implication, any theological undertaking that substantially incorporates any offering from this “History.”

Second, Camus may also be the only one who in his anti-philosophy understands that ultimately “hope does not and cannot spring eternal.”

Third, Camus who does not and cannot hold that there are ethical norms in an absurd universe, still shows that willy-nilly “the work of the law” is written on his heart (Rom. 2:15a) which prompts him defensively to “fight” (of sorts) for what he designates as “justice” and accusatorily against what he designates as “injustice” (Rom. 2:15b), absurdity and all.

Fourth, all this should produce, if not constitute a “cry” for the Christian community, including, if not especially its scholarship, to opt for a Gospel-Apologetics as the only instrument that effectively can and compassionately must address dismal and heart breaking (be it rebellious) “victims” of hopelessly “empty” as well as “deceptive” philosophies and, for that matter, of any theology that adopts their “hopeless” endeavors. Substantive Sisyphus labors on the part of (blind and rebel) unbelievers can only be remedied by a heart-transplant in regeneration, and methodological such labors on the part of believers (without 20-20 vision) by a heart-purification in sanctification. Only the definitive Gospel can accomplish the former, and only the progressive Gospel the latter. Any Apologetic method that only aims at a mental agreement, whether Classical (either pre- or non-evangelistic), Evidential (pre-evangelistic), Presuppositional (non-evangelistic) or Neo-presuppositional (non-evangelistic) is neither authentically biblical (Acts 2:28; 17:30) nor up to the task! All this really goes to say that any theological undertaking that does not explicitly incorporate the action required by it, does not insistently call for such action, and does not precipitate it may be straight like a gun barrel. But it is just as empty! When it does no more than creating heated controversy, it will go down as a “verbal tempest in a mental teapot.” Unless it is theology-unto-hands-on-ethics, that is, unless it “enlivens,” it is “dead on arrival.”

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Spotlight VIII

The Problem with the Analogy Concept

My repeated and careful reading of Long, PSTG, esp. 3-115, alerted me eventually to the recognition that in his superb and possibly unparalleled (?) analysis of Aquinas, even if it may show some weakness in not digging deep enough into the historical roots and philosophical origin of his theological sources, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, he mentions how Aquinas time and again puts the brakes on his own conclusions on account of their non-univocal language, that is, language that *must* be used, if it wishes to “predicate” anything about God, but *can never* succeed in predicating what it seeks to predicate. In a word, it can never step over its own shadow.

Whenever and wherever Reformed scholastics, in whatever time period up to the present, “badmouth” the language of Scripture by declaring it “deficient,” “inappropriate,” and, and as we shall see, even “false” (be it, to a degree), they simply show that they buy into all this, and have no hunch of the complementarity of truth in which there is mysterious but total harmony between a perfectly *transcendent* God and a *perfect* immanent Scripture, together with a gap that is unbridgeable to the human mind. Even to speak of “the *problem* of predication” is to head towards a theo-ontological bridge too far, as it operates from the primacy (or ultimacy) of the intellect and betrays to that extent a mind that, even willy-nilly, is too “arrogant.” Candidly, there is no such “problem” for the humble child-like heart, no problem whatsoever. Candidly, I am not sure whether Long is aware of this. If he is, he fails to bring out its implications. Aquinas at first justifies his analogy concept by

claiming that “creatures imitate God within the limits of their own nature and are therefore like God in some respect ... All along his career, Aquinas’s constant effort was to account for the relationship of likeness linking the created world to God while at the same time contending that there is no common feature shared by both God and his creatures.” In short, “creatures imitate God within the limits of their own nature and are therefore like God in some respect,” even if “there is no common feature shared by both God and his creatures.” Of course, this comes down to “wishful thinking.” He must have recognized this, since he argued later that “creatures are related to God and imitate God because they are *caused* by God.” This is based on the principle that “every agent produces something like itself. This principle (supposedly) holds even if no common feature is shared by the agent and its effect.” See for this specifically, Giorgio Pini, “The Development of Aquinas’s Thought,” in OHA, 499-50. And also, Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in CPMA, 649, “According to Aquinas (in typical Aristotelian fashion) one cannot give what one has not got. A productive cause expresses itself, or shows itself forth, in its effects, which can therefore be said to be like it.” Of course, this did not get over too well either. Such is also argued by Stephen Dumont, “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus,” in RHMP, 291ff. Already in the Middle Ages, neither Henry of Ghent (1217-1293) nor Duns Scotus (1266-1308) believed that Aquinas with his reference to “Divine Causality” (*a la* Aristotle!) was out of the woods. They were fully aware of the relationship conundrum between unapproachable Divine transcendence and mundane human language. Henry of Ghent was still on board with the “analogy versus equivocity” thesis but opened a backdoor to a “univocity” of sorts. “He conceded that God and creature could be brought together in a common concept, yet found a way to deny that such a notion was univocal” ... By way of abstraction (similar to the three *viae*) Henry arrives at what he calls “analogous commonness” which “provides the necessary epistemological bridge from creature to God by constituting a concept of both at once” ... Henry’s solution is remarkable for how close it comes to an admission of univocity” (305-306). As soon as one assumes, claims, or insists that one’s language is “informative,” to whatever extent, one sneaks “univocity” into the picture. The only alternative to doing this, is to remain totally silent. At any rate, Duns Scotus, on the other hand, saw the “murkiness” of Henry’s proposal, and opted for “univocity versus analogy” to escape skepticism, but, of course, left (theologically) the backdoor open for Divine transcendence. A perceptive commentator concluded that even if Scotus arrived at his position as a progressive refinement of Henry’s admittedly “con-fused analogous concept” which only yields “the appearance of univocity” (308-309), the two of them were in essential verbal agreement that the nature of transcendence does not disqualify the truth value of the descriptive language of transcendence. This was undoubtedly a *theological* affirmation of one of the “articles of faith,” found in Scripture and Tradition, as both endorsed and enforced by the Church. But *philosophically* it was no more than lip-service. At any rate, it seems that for both this was an unavoidable conclusion to escape unacceptable “equivocity.” But, frankly, just like Aquinas, neither one was admittedly able to make their conclusion compellingly intelligible, that is, to make it “stick.” The earlier conclusion that to follow in Aquinas’ analogical footsteps is to end up with a language that conveys *nothing*, combined with the later conclusion as per below that it is to end up with a God of whom we know *nothing* speaks volumes, of course, all possible protestations to the contrary. From my perspective this should not come as a surprise. Only the *regenerate-heartfelt* embrace of the incomprehensible complementarity of truth would have solved the shared Medieval scholastic conundrum. But this biblical concept was not even on the horizon of medieval content-scholastics. In fact, it could not be! Without a grasp of the New Covenant Gospel with its promise of a heart transplant in regeneration as the only restful lodging place for all complementary truth, they resorted to an Aristotelian primacy, if not ultimacy of the intellect. This explains also why Medieval scholasticism resembled an ever-continuing battleground! All participants took a sure to fail intellectual stab at seeking to synthesize the non-synthesizable and ended up in a confusion of languages. The Reformers made a valiant effort to clear the decks with the *Sola Scriptura* principle as their exclusive *principium cognoscendi*. But post-Reformation scholasticism, whatever its merits, too uncritically adopted at times the bottom-up approach and with it its inevitable analogy concept, which is essentially unintelligible. This should be clear to everyone who subscribes to the astounding (?) conclusion of a reputable Aquinas commentator, “*For St. Thomas, when we speak of God, we don’t know what we are talking about* (italics, mine). We are simply taking language from the familiar context in which we understand it, and using it to beyond what we understand into the mystery that surrounds us and sustains the world we do partly understand” (McCabe, 1992, as quoted in Davies (CPMA, 649). This, once again, runs parallel to what we saw already, the greater the gap between the so-called analogical language of the predicator and what is predicated the less informative the language becomes. When the gap is absolute the information shrinks to nothing, zilch, nada! This comes down to a lamentable “kiss of death” for the theological enterprise and so must produce tears of compassion for its practitioners. The bottom line is this. Failing in heartfelt principle to embrace the incomprehensible complementarity of truth in a child-like fashion and putting his eggs, instead, in the

Aristotelian basket of the primacy, if not ultimacy of the intellect, Aquinas was in regrettable practice victimized, if not “doomed” to pursue a necessarily failing attempt to synthesize what no human mind ever is able to synthesize. In a rather “prophetic” manner Stephen Hawking stated once that if he were able to synthesize the universality of the General Theory of Relativity with the particularity of Quantum Physics in a Grand Theory of Everything, he would have arrived at “the mind of God,” not recognizing (of course?) that this, once and for all, sealed the doom of his pursuit of such a Grand All-encompassing Theory. God simply could not and does not allow for any such Theory to be successful that would spell his own demise, in fact, his non-existence, by definition! The pursuit of such Theory is not just an act of epistemological rebellion. The pursuit itself is an ontological impossibility. At any rate, Aquinas’ life-long (basically, *hubris*) attempt to accomplish the impossible, which he shares with all Medieval scholastics, reveals a rift between Aquinas and the child-like Reformers that is unbridgeable, and frankly, should be unbridgeable for the followers of both. For the go-stop-go syndrome, see yet, Brian Davies, “The Limits of Language and the Notion of Analogy,” in OHA, 390-397, esp. 394-395. For the intricate and apparently inconclusive arguments to avoid equivocity in both Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, see Dumont, “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus,” in RHMP, 296-323, esp. 305-306, 308-309, 321-322. See also, Dumont, “John Duns Scotus,” in CPMA, 354-356; R. Wielockx, *Henry of Ghent*, in CPMA, 296ff; Russell L. Friedman, “Latin Philosophy, 1200-1350,” in OHMP, 211; and Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages: An Introduction,” in CPMA, 6-7. I would not be surprised if Reformed scholastics who “get all this” would be a lot less inclined to give Aquinas as well as the scholastic period in general mostly a clean bill of health. Even where their *basic* doctrinal position may be fully biblical, such as, the Trinity, the now undeniable infestation of a philosophical “handmaiden turned mistress” that essentially rules the theo-ontological roost must at least set off more than a few alarm bells!

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But there is an additional feature in Aquinas’ thinking that is just as important, if not more so. Let me explain. Even if the “bottom-up” method of theologizing is the hallmark of Aquinas’ *approach*, “The Self-knowledge of God” serves as *his point of departure*. Since this “Self-knowledge” is not known, in fact, unknowable, it led, as we saw, to two non-negotiable necessities. The first necessity is that it, at least philosophically, can only be reached from “below.” There is no other choice but to climb the ladder “upward.” This spawned the three *viae*, the *via causalitatis*, the *via negationis* or *negativa* and the *via eminentiae*. The second necessity is the admission that in one’s language one can only *approximate* the top of the ladder. As we saw, this generated the “analogy” concept. Scholars by and large agree on the accuracy of this assessment. In fact, they generally paint the same picture with the recognition that the unknown and unknowable self-knowledge of God is the undisputed biblico-traditional and theologico-ecclesiastical starting point, which is simultaneously a summit that the philosophical “handmaiden” seeks but fails to climb.²⁰¹

But now the additional feature, what is hardly, if ever brought out in explicit detail, is the fact that the type of theologizing espoused by Aquinas has the indelible imprint of Platonian/Aristotelian/Plotinian philosophy upon it. This found its way into his thinking through *Dionysius* whom he quotes profusely.²⁰² This is undeniable and indisputable in the light of *Dionysius*’ pedigree! Writes the latter, “At the conclusion of the ascent from what is ‘furthest’ from God to God himself we penetrate into the Darkness which is beyond the intelligible, and there is no longer merely concision but an absence of language, a total cessation of speech and of thought. God is ineffable, like the One of Parmenides: ‘It is not named or spoken of, not an object of opinion or of knowledge, not perceived by any creature’

²⁰¹ Muller, PRRD, I, 92; see also Long (of sorts ?), PSTG, 130, 141.

²⁰² *Dionysius* well may be the primary source of the philosophical thinking of Aquinas, if his quotations from his writings in his *Summa Theologiae* in pivotal places (!) is any indication.

(Parmenides).²⁰³ This is also Aquinas' philosophical point of departure. So, whenever and wherever Reformed orthodoxy uncritically followed in Aquinas' footsteps it demonstrably displayed the same (apostate) philosophical imprint as evidenced in the scholastic embrace of the archetypal-ectypal distinction, the use of three *viae*, and the adoption of the "analogy" concept.

It is precisely at this point that we encounter the principal and radical difference with the Reformers. Due to the *Sola/Tota Scriptura* principle as their exclusive point of departure (*principium cognoscendi*), they can and do "theologize" from the top down to the extent it is revealed.²⁰⁴ They do not start with the incomprehensible perfectly simple God, that is with "God as (an unknown and unknowable) mystery" and seek to climb that hill philosophically from the bottom up. No, they take their point of departure concretely with the known and knowable knowledge of God as revealed in Scripture, systematize it theologically, and in a child-like manner come to a halt where mystery is indicated.²⁰⁵ As a result, should not the question be asked whether the difference between the Reformers and the post-Reformation scholastics who follow the content-scholasticism of Aquinas with his "way up," hand in hand with his philosophical considerations, is not more pronounced, that is, "gap-like," than is widely advocated today? It is hard for me to imagine that a Reformer could even ponder, let alone have a sleepless night or breaks his brain about the query how to climb the incomprehensible Mt. Everest of the incomprehensible way in which "the incomprehensible God incomprehensibly thinks of the incomprehensible Godself." There is not a trace of this in Calvin's *Institutes* or Melancthon's *Loci*, both of which either pointed (Calvin) or paved (Melancthon) the way to the systematizing of Biblical truth (doctrine). To my knowledge no Reformed Systematic Theology, published in the last Century or so, even addresses this as an issue! In the Reformers the incomprehensibility of God does not stand in a contrastive or

²⁰³ For this see, Jean Yves Lacoste, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), I, 114.

²⁰⁴ See for this extensively, Muller, PRRD, II, 151-223, esp. 151, 179, "The logical (unconditional and absolute) priority of Scripture over all other means of religious knowing in the church--tradition, present-day corporate or official doctrine, and individual insight or illumination--lies at the heart of the teaching of the Reformation." Subsequent Reformed Orthodoxy simply codified it unanimously and set it in concrete.

²⁰⁵ It should not come as a surprise that Calvin, in contrast to post-Reformation theologians, does not use the archetype-ectype distinction, nor for that matter the three *viae*, or the analogy concept. The reason is simple. He takes his point of departure in the "perfect and complete truth" of God as deposited in his inerrant Scripture. To be sure, Calvin recognizes "the incapacity of the finite for the infinite" and holds that creaturely language as "applied to the hidden majesty of God" in a sense comes up short. He (regrettably?) calls this language in one instance *improprium quoddammodo*, to be correctly translated as "somehow improper" (showing a greater "hesitation" than Muller's translation (PRRD, I, 263) as "somewhat improper"). But he would never agree with a later author that Scripture is "an imperfect and inappropriate instrument at its very best." Even if our theology (*theologia nostra*) is never perfect, due to the "weakness of our mind" and because of "the loss of our full capacity to relate to God in the fall," God's "revealed theology (*theologia revelata*, in Scripture) is (by definition) perfect, (even) if limited (preferable to improper)." For all this see Muller, PRRD, I, 260-269, esp. 263-264, 266-267. The bottom line is this. To the extent that Reformed orthodoxy embraces Aquinas in its "upward" theologizing, inclusive of both its substance and its terminology, the gap between it and Calvin is and should be undeniable. This by and large appears to escape Muller in his otherwise impressively descriptive four volumes. Even if Calvin were to concede that God's self-knowledge which is beyond our comprehension and grasp could be describes as "archetypal," which incidentally and admittedly he never did, he never could or would make this his conceptual point of departure. It would be a betrayal of the *Sola Scriptura* watchword, Holy Writ as the sole *principium cognoscendi*. Whenever and however post-Reformation Reformed theologians incorporate the "Platonian/Aristotelian/Plotinian type of philosophy" of Aquinas in their thinking, they at the least serve two masters. They are basically "adversarial." As we shall see further below, the bottom-up approach, however much it may seek to defend biblical truth, essentially vitiates the *Sola Scriptura* principle in its methodology.

adversarial relationship to the knowability of God. Their relationship is tension free and unproblematic. Even if they do not go on explicit record in setting forth the “complementarity of truth” in so many words, this concept is woven in the warp and woof of their thinking, of their theologizing, in fact, of their lives. After all, they were born again. They experienced a heart transplant. Therefore, they had a royal, ready-made lodging-place for it. My philosophy professor put it well. “Do you know the only way to glue two pieces of a broken plate together without ever noticing a trace of a break?” Frankly, we wondered about this, until he smiled and said, “Don’t break the plate in the first place!” Unregenerate hearts that are substantially committed to the ultimacy of the intellect break the plate by definition and can never put Humpty-Dumpty together again. When they receive a heart transplant (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3), they are graced with a vision of an unbroken plate. Regenerate hearts that are methodologically committed to the primacy of the intellect, hold with their unregenerate counterparts that the plate is broken, and enlist their assistance to glue the pieces together, encounter the same Humpty-Dumpty conundrum. When they receive a heart purification (Jam. 4:8b), the vision of an unbroken plate becomes theirs as well. Armed with that vision, they unconditionally embrace in a child-like way the incomprehensible reality of the complementarity of truth and a result not only abstain from even nibbling at the “secrets” of God like the plague, but also are bound to put all their mental, volitional, emotional, entrepreneurial, financial, educational, personal, corporate etc., etc., etc., eggs in the basket of practical godliness according to the explicit mandate of God, culminating in Christ’s Grand Triple Command as “the only thing needful,” until his Return. In the meantime, praying fervently that these “eggs” will hatch by the grace of God to the glory of God in daily conversions and daily holiness (Mt. 29:19-20b)! When all this is “put into practice,” one can be assured of the ever-abiding, protecting, guarding, encouraging, empowering, enabling, etc., etc., presence of one’s Commander-in-Chief (Mt. 28:20b). If not and when not, “all bets are off!” Church History could not make this clearer. The March of the Church through History is a Go-Stop Affair. Frankly, unless it goes, it stops. Even marching on the spot is not acceptable, if Paul is any indication (Phil. 3:12-15). In the concluding section of this volume I intend to share some biblical guidelines that must be followed for the present Church to be the God-intended Church.

Spotlight IX

Assessing the Philosophical Roots of the Bottom-Up approach by Aquinas

There is no doubt that Aquinas was enticed to take the bottom-up approach by “an anonymous treatise, probably written by a fifth-century Syrian monk (known as pseudo-Dionysius), who posed as Paul’s disciple, Dionysius the Areopagite, entitled *On the Divine Names*.” In it the unknowability of God ruled supreme, in the footsteps of Greek philosophers, and especially Plotinus. He set off the many centuries long controversy how to make proper predication about an essentially “equivocal” reality. This context precipitated the origination of the well-known triad of equivocity-analogy-univocity. See for this, Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages: An Introduction,” in CPMA, 6-7. See also Long, PSTG, 99-113, for the copious quotations of Dionysius’ treatise by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*. Eric D. Perl, Pseudo-Dionysius,” in CPMA, 540-549, sheds further light on Dionysius. A summary of his observations should have a sizable pay-off. So, here we go. Strongly influenced by “the pagan Neoplatonist Proclus (412-485), Dionysius posits, *without offering a “philosophical justification” for his own Neoplatonism* (italics, mine) that God is “beyond being and knowledge.” This is based upon “the

fundamental (Parmenidean) law that to be is to be intelligible.” In a word, “intelligibility is co-extensive with being.” However, since being that is graspable intellectually is by definition “determinate,” “dependent upon determination,” and thereby a “definite, *finite* (italics, mine) ‘this,’” a “derivative” entity--“the first principle of reality,” that is, “the source of the totality of all things,” cannot be “a member within this totality,” and therefore “cannot be any being.” If it were, it would be “finite.” Hence “it is beyond being and beyond the grasp of the intellect.” “This Plotinian argument ... underlies the whole of Dionysius’ thought and furnishes the starting point whose implications he unfolds.” In fact, he does not even want to predicate that “God is unknowable.” To do so, would be “in effect to identify him as an unknowable being and to lay claim to some knowledge of him.” Hence, he argues that God is “beyond negation and affirmation.” Not just “ineffable and unknowable, but beyond ineffability and unknowing.” “Negative theology for Dionysius and Plotinus, consists therefore not in negations, but in *silence* (italics, mine).” We must “honor the hidden of the divinity, beyond mind and being, with unsearchable and sacred reverence of mind, and ineffable things with wise silence,” that is, with “the cessation of every intellectual activity,” in “complete “non-activity of all knowledge.” Of course, this posits problems for concepts, such as creation, creatureliness, evil, Christ, the Church etc. He construes creation as a “theophany.” This to say, God is the “creator of all things as their constitutive ‘determination.’” They are “differentiated presentations of God.” He “pre-contains all things in himself. He is the “enfolding of all things,” just as all things are the unfolding of God.” He is all things in all things and nothing in any.” He is “all things in all things in that the whole of reality is the differentiated presence of God and “nothing in any” in that he is not himself any one thing, distinguished from others within that whole and constituted by this distinction. Thus he is at once utterly transcendent an utterly immanent: transcendent in that he is not any being, not included within reality as any member of it; immanent in that he is immediately present to all things as their being and all their perfections. The creation of the world, then, the production or emergence of all things from God, is the differentiation, distribution, or impartation whereby God is differently present to all things and thus makes them to be. God is not a differentiated being, but the very Differentiation in virtue of which each creature is itself and so is.” This Differentiation, in a typical Neo-platonic fashion, implies “remaining” and “procession.” Created realities “*remain contained* as effect in their causal determination without distinction.” At the same time, as effects their “differentiation procession constitutes them as realities distinct from each other and thus from the cause. Hence the production of the world, for Dionysius as for the Neoplatonists, is the manifestation in intelligible multiplicity of its principle (“god”), not the making of other beings additional to that principle. Thus, creation is nothing but theophany: the divine Nothing is known in all things as their intelligible perfections.” However, created reality as an effect not only remains and proceeds from its “principle” (“god”), but also reverts and returns to it. This “*exitus-reditus* cycle, characteristic of Neoplatonism and adopted by Dionysius, spells “*participation*” (italics, mine) in which “god” as “the determinative principle of all things is both the source and the end of all things.” This “god-principle” is further dressed up as the Good and the Beautiful. As such it creatively distributes himself and creatively draws things to himself. The name “Love” is added to explain that the “god-principle” cannot be or remain “infertile in itself.” It is “ecstatic and moves itself to productive action.” As “Love” the “god-principle” is “*not a self-contained being* (italics, mine), but the creative differentiation, the constitutive procession determination of all things.” But by its participation in the so-called Love (as well as the Beauty and Goodness) of the “god-principle,” created reality adheres to the Platonic principle that it is by definition motivated to desire, that is to revert to the “god-principle,” to its Goodness and Beauty. As such it is ultimately the “god-principle” that attracts the creature to itself as its perfection, thus responsible for “the cyclical metaphysical motion” of both “procession” and “reversion.” This motion is “the very being of all things” and “described by Dionysius as ‘the whirling circle of divine love.’” With this as backdrop he describes “evil” as “privation,” the privation of what is beautiful and good, in fact, of love,” that is, “fully to be” and “fully to act according to one’s “constitutive nature,” which is “essentially good,” even in demons.” In a word, it is a “deficiency,” not “a positive attribute,” and a “failure,” not “a positive activity.” In fact, even in one’s “desiring the worst life,” the epitome of “non-being,” ... the very fact of desiring” stamps it as a “participation in the Good.” Furthermore, this same backdrop determines that the encounter with the “god-principle” takes place by means of creation as a set of symbols, in which it (1) presents and reveals and simultaneously (2) shields and conceals itself. This is “another version of creation as theophany, of both God’s absolute transcendence and immanence. Dionysius, “far from denigrating symbolical knowledge of God in favor of an (impossible) non-symbolic encounter, exalts symbols as our only access to the inaccessible divinity.” Hence, he describes “symbols,” inclusive of all possible names of God as “sacred veils.” Since “the philosophical content of Dionysius’ thought cannot be abstracted from its theological aspects” (“Dionysius has a single undifferentiated vision of reality in its relation to God”) it does not come as a surprise that his Neoplatonism affects (infects!) his doctrinal edifice, such as his Christology, his

soteriology as well as his ecclesiology and his sacramentology. For instance, the incarnation is presented “in terms of symbolism and theophany, and thus in continuity with the metaphysics of creation.” In it “the (hidden) beyond being becomes a being (in human way).” But “it remains inexpressible by any word or mind. What is said remains ineffable and what is thought unknowable.” As such “incarnation, God becoming manifest as a being, is a model for all creation, which shares in its incarnational nature.” The bottom line for creation as well as for Christ as one created instance or entity is symbolical and dialectic concealment in revelation! Furthermore, since the world’s fall into evil is a loss of being, its salvation in Christ is its restoration to the fullness of being, to its status as theophany.” This goes hand in hand with the Church and its sacrament into the realization and fulfillment of reality as symbol, as the presence and manifestation of the inaccessible, unmanifest God.” This much for the summary. Incidentally, John Marenbon, “The Late Ancient Background to Medieval Philosophy,” in *OHMP*, 18ff, esp. 20, underscores this analysis. In the footsteps of Plotinus, who posits “an unknowable, absolutely unitary first principle, the One or the Good,” Dionysius “brought to Christian thought a radically negative theology.” Perl’s twofold conclusion is both telling and worthy of note. He first emphasizes that “the importance of Dionysius as a source for later medieval philosophy can hardly be overstated” (This is echoed by Borje Byden & Katerina Ierodiakonou, “Greek Philosophy,” in *OHMP*, 31). “Scholastic philosophy draws extensively on Dionysius, the radical transcendence of God, the inadequacy of all thought and language with regard to him, creation as a system of signs or symbols of God, participation, the procession of all things from God and their return to him, the metaphysics of divine love, and evil as a deficiency of being, etc.” “None of these Scholastic themes can be adequately understood without reference to Dionysius.” He, then, argues that Dionysius’ thought has an inestimable “intrinsic value.” His “uncompromising ontology,” “the coincidence of divine transcendence and immanence,” “the metaphysics of creation as a theophany,” “the philosophical vision of reality as the Great Dance, in which beauty the beginning and end of all things and love is the foundation and moving principle of being” are a healthy and welcome antidote “to the subjective, epistemological, moral and psychological approaches that characterize so much of modern thought.” The reason for mentioning all this, even if only in a Spotlight, is simple. By adopting Dionysius as one of his dominant mentors, Aquinas finds himself head over heels in the thoroughly pagan Neoplatonist quagmire (For the (alarming) “pervasive Neoplatonism” in Aquinas, such as the “internal ‘emanations’ or ‘processions’ within the divine essence,” and “the subsequent ‘emanations’ of ‘all beings from the universal being’ or ‘procession of creatures,’” see also Wayne J. Hankey, “Aquinas, Plato, and Neoplatonism,” in *OHA*, 60-62). Aquinas seeks to bring philosophically to expression what, by his own Neoplatonist definition, cannot be brought to expression. By taking refuge in the “murky” doctrine of undefinable “analogy,” he demonstrates this (Hankey, in *OHA*, 62, “Aquinas (to be sure) develops his doctrine of analogy to prevent all our judgments about God from being false.” But he admittedly cannot determine a compelling truth-value of “analogical” language. So, it does not and cannot do the job). At any rate, it should be crystal clear that despite his “traditional” terminology of “God,” “transcendence,” “immanence,” “creation,” “Christ,” “church,” etc., the gap between Dionysius and Scripture could not be wider. Perl’s positive view fails to recognize that what goes by the board, to mention only a limited number of items, is the Biblical knowledge of God, the Biblical Creator-creature distinction, the Biblical nature of the Fall, the Biblical reality of evil as an active force, as well as Biblical doctrines, such as the New Covenant, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, and the non-symbolical nature of the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc., etc. There should be little doubt that the apostle Paul would have viewed the Neoplatonist edifice as an impressive but still massive suppression of the God of truth and the truth of God, and would have earmarked it as “empty, futile, fraudulent and deceitful.” So, to the extent that Aquinas, regardless his (proper) “theological” convictions, adopts Dionysius and his Neoplatonism in his (improper) “philosophical” considerations, the gap between him and the Reformation could not be wider either. In the footsteps of Dionysius, he cautiously adopts the notion of “sacred veils,” thus introducing the apostate Neoplatonist dialectic of “concealment in revelation” in his philosophical theology. Whether he was fully conscious of it or not, it certainly was an unmistakable error in judgment. For his commitment to “sacred veils” and the dialectic as well as the negative theology that comes with it, see also Long, *PSTG*, 103-105, and Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in *CPMA*, 646-647. All this is underscored by Eyjolfur K. Emilsson, “Neo-Platonism,” in David Furley, ed., *From Aristotle to Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1997), 356-387, esp. 361, 363-372, 375, 378-379, 384. He argues that Plotinus as the Master-Thinker and Father of Neo-Platonism exercised an enormous influence on Porphyry as its “Disseminator,” on Proclus as its “System Builder,” and through these two upon Pseudo-Dionysius, who pretended to be the Dionysius mentioned in the Acts as a Christian convert of Paul.” See for this, also, Ury, *TP*, 130-131, for a telling statement. Although in the minority as a pagan in a Christian world, Proclus not only “had an ironic revenge against the Christians: his system is the philosophical

foundation of the ‘Christian Theology’ of Pseudo-Dionysius,” but through him he had also made a decisive impact “upon the medieval Christian tradition.” The bottom line is that “the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (with his Parmenidean and Aristotelizing Platonism) acquired an immense authority.” As a direct result “the whole of Christian Medieval theology was thoroughly colored by Neo-Platonism.” Indeed, the irony is inescapable! This irony comes even more clearly (and more impressively) to expression in Frans Jozef van Beeck, SJ, “Trinitarian Theology as Participation,” in Davis, TT, 308-309, “Before Aquinas ever discovered Aristotle’s wealth of insight and knowledge, his theological world had been permanently shaped by an anonymous Syrian monk nowadays called Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.” He “had plunged, breathtakingly, into the dark waters of the ‘un-saying’ (*apophysis*): the most divine knowledge of God is that which comes about by ignorance, by way of a union that surpasses the mind, when the mind taking distance from all beings, and then also letting go of itself is united with God by splendors more dazzling out of which and in which it draws enlightenment by the inscrutable depth of divine wisdom.” Subsequently he left this behind as such an all-controlling legacy that it also captivated (imprisoned? victimized?) Aquinas, “When we proceed towards God *on the road of removal*, we first deny everything incorporeal of God. Then we deny everything spiritual as it is found in creatures, such as goodness and wisdom. At that point all that is left in our minds that God is, and nothing else; thus God is in a kind of perplexing fashion, so to speak. *Last of all*, however, we remove from God even this very being according as it occurs in creatures. At that point, God is left in a kind of darkness of ignorance; yet *after the manner of this ignorance*—at least so long as we are on our present way—we are *best united with God*, as Dionysius says. It is a dark cloud of sorts, in which God is said to dwell.” In short (325), “the experience of the mind being lifted up into God is essentially *agnostic*.”

Frankly, I am not sure why all this is not mentioned more, let alone examined extensively in the analysis and assessment of Medieval scholasticism. There are only a few “occasional” references to Neo-Platonism in Muller, PRRD, I, 70, 160; III, 38, 114, 119, 507; and IV, 42, and similarly to Pseudo-Dionysius in Muller, PRRD, I, 376, 378; III, 38; and IV, 40. Neither one receives the same thorough attention as the Reformers and Post-Reformation orthodoxy. Nor do the references display the same analytic prowess with which these are treated. All this, of course, was and is in the discretion of the author. But without knowing the origin, location, and nature of an iceberg below the waterline, it is easy to miss something (much? too much?) by only observing its peak, however thorough, detailed, and impressive this may be. There is a crying need routinely to employ “submersibles” in addition to “observation decks” to analyze, assess, and recognize what “theologies” and “philosophies,” as well as “ideologies” and “theories” in general, are all about, where they come from and where they are heading, not to end up “surprised,” let alone in a calamitous dead-end street. Candidly, being unaware of the nature of Dionysius’ influence upon Aquinas is one thing. But being confronted with it and still giving Aquinas not only a point-blank clean bill of health, but also pressing him in promising service, is quite another. Could this be unconscionable, especially upon recognition that the Reformation was the only way out of the Medieval quagmire? Of course, this, once again, does not imply that nothing he ever wrote is non-endorsable. But it is to alert folks to the reality that a philosophico-theological edifice, however impressive, that originates in the wrong, in fact, an apostate philosophical radix and is built upon a wrong, in fact, a mixed Tradition/Scripture (ecclesiastical/biblical) foundation, cannot but head in the wrong direction. At any rate, even if in the embrace of Aquinas Post-Reformation scholasticism was open and still may be open to the influence of this pagan tradition in which he was schooled, the Reformers radically and decisively broke with it by turning to the principle of *Sola Scriptura* as the sole *principium cognoscendi*. This meant at least two things to them. First, the language of Scripture must be taken at face-value and may not be devalued as “mysteriously symbolic,” by definition, let alone be told to be “silent,” that is essentially “to shut up!” While God’s “secrets” of whatever sort are out of bonds, the knowledge of God that Scripture conveys, while never “exhaustive,” is nevertheless indomitably true and stands like a rock, whether it is meaningfully literal (Descriptively Historical), meaningfully figurative (Poetry) or meaningfully symbolic (Apocalypse). Further, the fundamental maxim “*Scriptura sui interpres*” (“Scripture interprets itself;” Muller, PRRD, I, 395-396) does not and cannot allow anything extraneous to have the dominating say, let alone pagan thought patterns, to warp the interpretation, understanding, and application of its Message. This is not the place to inquire at length into all the transcendental conditions that are responsible for the emergence of “movements,” such as, Neoplatonism. This would carry me way too far. But the root of the Plotinian/Dionysian quagmire can (must!) be traced back to the fundamental dialectic in which the two contrastive poles that make up this dialectic mutually presuppose and exclude each other. This dialectic governs all thought and action that is the product of or derives from apostate man. It is a Siren Song and is doomed to a Sisyphus labor. The mutual presupposition of the two poles makes the hope for a synthesis spring eternal. Their mutual exclusion dashes this hope to pieces. The insistence that *silence* is and should both be and have the *final* word demonstrates this. Incidentally, the post-Kantian

philosopher, Martin Heidegger, and the post-modern philosopher, Richard Rorty, also arrive at “silence” as their end station. So essentially is Jacques Derrida (See Bradley G. Green, *The Gospel and the Mind* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 21-122, 140-141; as well as Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 162-163, who shows that from a post-modern perspective all “literature is self-contradictory ... it is the steady fluctuation of an entity away from and toward its own mode of being.” In a word, the universality of literary language is “immediately” disqualified by the sovereign rule of “the particular.” Lingual “duration” can never be synthesized with the punctiliar “now.” It is no surprise that de Man, 246-266, turns to Martin Heidegger to validate his literary “theory”). Of course, *necessary* “silence” in-authenticates *all* “speaking” by definition, whether philosophical or otherwise. There is an identifiable reason why they continue “talking,” namely the hunger of the rebel heart to arrive at a synthesis and “finally” to find “rest” (shalom) in the total accounting of what reality is all about, without any loose ends. So, what comes into view at this point is much more than a self-defeating “logical contradiction” that according to some critics even a child would be able to observe (*versus* Ronald Nash). The victimizing “apostate dialectic” has them “trapped” and therefore is fully responsible for it. It produces a “blindness” that does and must fail to recognize that statements, such as, “There is no absolute truth and that is the absolute truth,” collapses of its own weight. It is a blindness of the *heart* as the life-mission control center that recognizes all its past and present enterprise(s) as essentially a Sisyphus labor, but simply cannot stop trying again and again in the conviction that sooner or later it will arrive at the summit of victory and is there to stay in sovereign control of the then totally captured universe. What if it does not arrive? Camus? So be it! Better heroically (defiantly?) to have tried and failed, then never to have tried at all!

By now it cannot go unnoticed any longer that all attempts on the part of unbelievers to synthesize universality and particularity end up with either universality “terrorizing” particularity or particularity “bucking” universality, whether philosophically, politically, economically, educationally, scientifically, etc., etc., personally or corporately (See for this also Is. 59:13, apostasy from God spawns (universalistic) tyranny and/or (particularistic) revolt). No wonder that the Lord enthroned in the heavens laughs and scoffs, and sooner or later will unleash his fury at the “ant-like” attempts of mankind to dethrone him (Ps. 2:4). Irony of ironies, in all this mankind cuts off its nose to spite its face. After all, in the Trinitarian God the harmony of the One and Many is an established fact. Since this is an essential mystery it can never be synthesized by the human mind. By its rebellious refusal to kiss the Son it will perish in its very efforts to take over the rule of the universe by seeking to accomplish the un-accomplishable (Ps. 2:12). Mankind is at the perennial crossroads. Either it kisses the Son and will enjoy the harmony and peace, first, of the Co-essential, Co-functional, Uncreated One-and-Many in God, and then of the co-essential, co-functional, created one-and-many in his universe. Or it refuses to bend its knees in repentance and faith, and forever be ground to powder by the now contrastive and adversarial one-and-many of its own doing that can only result in perpetual disharmony and enduring warfare.

By now it should also be clear that apologetic methodologies that aim at mental agreement cannot provide the remedy. The rot goes deeper. This “deeper,” which is the rebel heart, blinds the mind to the extent that it is “happy” to declare “without blushing” that “it is the absolute truth that there is no absolute truth!” Here particularity reigns supreme. In its all-encompassing and sovereign “universality” it trounces “universality.” Only a rebel heart that seeks to dethrone God, whether totally aware of this or not, is capable of “living” (shalom-like) with this self-destructive “death.” Elite thinkers at times recognize their self-inflicted condition. But either they hold that there is an answer (Plotinus and (the band-aid of) his “mystical” *ekstasis*). Or they decide to live and die with it (Bertrand Russell, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus). In either case, they reject “the cure.” The “malady” can only be undone and “the cure” can only be offered by a Gospel Apologetics that aims at a heart transplant in regeneration (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:5). No other apologetics that only did, does, or will aim at an agreement of the mind can even (or ever) hope to be effective, except despite itself by an ironic grace of God (See for a sample of this John 11:49-52. It is no secret and no surprise that practitioners of such apologetics routinely bemoan the fact that they rarely, if ever see conversions. A further in-depth explanation of this must await another occasion or context, apart from one final observation. It is “weird,” even if not surprising that all “synthesizers” in whatever way and to whatever degree, end up in the same no-man’s land. Whether they favor and enthrone “universality,” such as by and large in Ancient Philosophy, or “particularity,” such as by and large in Modern Philosophy, their “God” (universality) or “god” (particularity) always remains undefined and undefinable, such as in Ancient Philosophy (Aristotle, Plotinus, as well as Dionysius and Aquinas in their *philosophical* theologizing in spite of their theological pro-universal nomenclature) and in Modern Philosophy (Kant, Heidegger, as well as Barth and Bultmann in their *philosophical* theologizing in spite of their biblical, be it anti-universal, necessarily “cipher” vocabulary).

At any rate, the upshot on the part of all (apostate) unbelief is clearly a never-ending dead-end street. The History of Philosophy, including its now radically and fully discarded Neoplatonist phase, is living (read: terrible) proof to that effect! Essentially, and admittedly, it never did, does, or go anywhere, although its hope did, does, and most likely will spring “eternal!” Why Paul’s designation of empty deceit does not become increasingly intelligible *and* appealing may be one of the greatest enigmas. Of course, there is more than space for a biblical type of philosophy that seeks to give a rational accounting of reality, if it is governed by the principles of Scripture, and thereby honors the complementarity of truth. Philosophy is not, by definition, a lost cause. It can be a beacon of illuminating light. As such, to mention two instances of the philosophy of science in both practical and theoretical physics, it exults in God in giving us light as both wave and particle, and equally exults in God in running the universe with the realities of both General Relativity and Quantum mechanics! For further details about the iron-clad structural control of the fundamental dialectic of “all men and things apostate” and its inevitable ravaging and tragic effects, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 87ff. In it I show that in the arena of theoretical physics Stephen Hawking fell prey to this as well. Incidentally, S. R. Holmes, “The Attributes of God,” in OHST, 66, contests the “charge” that Aquinas leans too much on Dionysius. But Long, PSTG, 99-113, in his more extensive and more careful comparison of these two thinkers makes a compelling case that Dionysius’ influence upon Aquinas is very “significant” (101), that they both embrace “the Neoplatonist triad of abiding-procession-return” (102), that their parallels are “striking” (104-105), that they both opt for the “upward ascent to God’s simplicity” (105), that they use “the same analogy” of the “one” sun and its “diverse” light beams to show how “the preexisting unity in God can give rise to multiplicity” (107-108), in short, that Dionysius provides Aquinas “with *the basic form* (italics, mine) how to approach the doctrine of God (112). This “basic form” pits both thinkers against the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformers but enters too often through the backdoor in Reformed orthodoxy until the present day. To the extent it does, it serves two mutually exclusive masters. This “basic form” and *Sola Scriptura* never do, never can, and never will mix!

If all this is “right on,” there can be only one conclusion on the part of Reformed orthodoxy of whatever age. Paul unmistakably condemns Plotinian philosophy, and Dionysian theology in its wake, as an outright suppression of God’s truth. To the extent that Aquinas follows in their footsteps we owe it to him and his followers to issue the same verdict. That this has far-reaching consequences for Reformed theology, apologetics, evangelism (“making disciples”) and sanctification (“teaching them to observe what God commands”) stands to eminent reason. For the impact of Neoplatonism upon the Christianity of the West, see yet Dermot Moran, in RHN, 508-526, and for its stimulus of the Christianity of the East, Dimitar Y. Domitrov, in RHN, 525-540. Neither West or East was devoid of Neoplatonist influence, although this was much more prominent, if not dominant, and lasting in the West through the influence of the so-called “great” and even “divine” Dionysius, his disciple and publicist, John Scotus Eriugena, Thomas Aquinas, and eventually Meister Eckhart.

In conclusion, Aquinas may well lean on Augustine even more than he does on Dionysius (Long, PSTG, 81-115). That Augustine shows Neoplatonist influence does not seem debatable (Ury, TP, 135, 218). However, due to his “stalwart commitment” to a Biblical grasp of “revelation and creation” he transcended “Greek philosophical categories,” especially typical “Plotinian” ones. He departed from the Plotinian “One,” conceived of God as intensely “personal,” speaks of the “incommunicability” of the three “mutually co-inherent,” “co-inexistent,” “perichoretic” Persons due to the inner-trinitarian “ontological” relations they sustain to each other in terms of (ungenerate) paternity, (generate) filiation, and (proceeding) spiration. As such, he gladly embraced “the simultaneous Athanasian emphasis on Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity,” thus confessing the Trinitarian, Tri-Personal God, further marked by the dynamic inner-trinitarian “economic” relationality of mutual, reciprocal, intimate, self-giving love. With the radical personal love-relationality of Oneness as Threeness and Threeness as Oneness he clearly said farewell to his initial Neoplatonism and left his Plotinian background behind. So also, if not emphatically, Ury, TP, 133-171. All this simply goes to say that the post-Plotinian-Neoplatonist Augustine and the Plotinian-Neoplatonist Dionysius are essentially not in the same ballpark, something that must have escaped Aquinas (as well as Long, PSTG, 81-115). But they share two similarities, one of which Aquinas must have sensed.

Ury, TP, 30-38, appears to have recognized the different ballparks. He differentiates so-called “realists” from “instrumentalists.” Realists, such as Augustine, start from revealed data (in Scripture) and argue (theologically) from the top down in “‘kataphatic’ descent.” Hence, he can call God “personal” and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit “Persons.” These are biblical “realities” that must have a basis in fact, and as such are known and knowable (versus Plotinian-Neoplatonism). Instrumentalists, however, such as Dionysius, make their start from manifest data (in creation), and argue (philosophically) from the bottom up, in “‘apophatic’ ascent.” They are climbing upward toward the ever unknown and the ever-unknownable (pro Plotinian-

Neoplatonism). Hence “no language” can have a basis in fact and therefore is at best “metaphorical.” However, both Augustine and Dionysius hold to the mystery of Divine Transcendence and for this reason attach the epitaph of “analogy” to their terminology. Philosophically speaking, “univocity” is out for both. Still their difference should not and may not be ignored. In fact, it must be punctuated, something that I do not quite see in Ury, who at bottom seems to be mystified why and how “realists” use non-existing legs to stand on. Deep down he is not sure. But he fails to explain why they proceed regardless. Candidly, I perceive in Augustine a (philosophical) theologian who (reluctantly?) designates his reasoning as “analogical,” but “mildly” (partly?) so, by virtue of his embrace of Scripture as the sole and perfect *principium cognoscendi*. The Transcendence-Immanence contrast is there and may not be overlooked. But in part, if not in the main, he does and must consider it “bridged” by the rocklike trustworthiness of biblical language, even if the exact contours cannot be (fully?) determined. Not so incidentally, the more the biblical language takes center stage, the more Plotinus and his Neoplatonism are relegated to the background, if not conquered. On the other hand, I see in Dionysius a (theological) philosopher who (unblushingly?) holds to a “analogical” position that is of the “strong” variety, due to his unwavering commitment to Plotinian Neoplatonism. The contrast between Transcendence and Immanence is not only there. It is in complete charge. The resulting gap is admittedly unbridgeable, invariably trumps univocity, and cannot but resort to a non-informative analogical approach that ends up in some type of “mystic ‘whatever.’” These trappings that led to mysticism in Plotinus (*ekstasis*), were essentially embraced by Dionysius, found their way in Aquinas, and came to full-fledged fruition in the mysticism of Meister Eckardt! Clearly, the more Plotinus and his Neoplatonism rule the roost, the wider the contrastive gap becomes and the more the biblical language recedes into the background, until it may well virtually vanish. Candidly, I see in Aquinas a mixture of the influence of Augustine’s theology and Dionysius’ philosophy. In the over-all footsteps of Dionysius, he presents an “unforgivingly” analogical picture. But in his Boethian definition of personhood, “an individual substance of a rational nature” (*naturae rationalis individua substantia*) the analogy is clearly somewhat (much?) “softer.” The application of this rational definition to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can hardly be understood without some type of (latent?) univocity that was “officially” exiled and has no right to return or even exist.

This brings us to the second similarity between Augustine and Dionysius, which they share with Aquinas as well as with Ury and many (most? all?) others, for that matter. It is the failure to make the incomprehensible complementarity of truth their foundational and uncompromising point of departure. They all seem to be busier than bees, if not at times set to move heaven and earth, to whatever degree and in whatever way, to look for, to position, or to develop a “bridge” that intelligibly connects Transcendence and Immanence. The time and energy spent on the nibbling at or the forays into “God’s essential secrets” seems to be incalculable, with the pursuit of God’s mandated ethics the unquestionable and grievous loser! All this said, it is undeniable that Augustine in setting forth Biblical truth unreservedly and unashamedly as a standard procedure throughout his ministerial career and writing labors more than just inches himself to complementarity in practice, even if he does not explicitly enunciate the principle. In fact, every icon, semi-icon, or non-icon who speaks or writes what he regards to be informative, if not compelling “truth,” is succumbing to, if not conquered by unwitting “complementarity.” Of course, in doing so he assumes, claims, or insists, whether consciously or not, on a semblance of “univocity,” unless, of course, he immediately disavows what he is saying or writing as merely non-informatively, let alone non-compellingly “analogical,” something that to his honor Martin Heidegger did, time and again. But the latter was and is a “rare bird.” The bottom line is this. “If you insist on ‘analogy,’ either ‘shut up’ in embarrassing silence or ‘repent’ in shameful sorrow.” Incidentally, Camus must have understood all this to a “T” (CAPITAL letter). But defiantly he refused to do both!

Frankly, do we need any additional reason to move beyond bland types of apologetics and squarely, with tears (!), confront “rebellion” as the “heart” of the problem with a *Gospel*-apologetics as the only God-ordained, God-given, and God-mandated instrument (capable) to return folks to God-pleasing and God-required “sanity?” All this, not just in *mental agreement* with Peter (Acts 2:38) and Paul (Acts 17:20), but in *heartfelt surrender* to our “Lord and our God” (John 20:28) who as our exclusive Model unceremoniously told a “blind and rebellious” individual (John 3:3, 5) that without the indisputable start of a heart-transplant, sovereignly effected by God, the Master-Surgeon (John 3:5; The Holy Spirit), using his chosen Scalpel (The Gospel; 1 Pet. 2:23-25) by means of his chosen Instruments (Proclaiming Humans; Rom. 10:10, 14), everything is over, except the shouting? Without a grasp of the biblical teaching on the human heart “Free-will Arminianism,” of course, can never “rise to this occasion,” although inconsistent Arminians can do so, have done so, and undoubtedly will do so. But Card-Carrying Reformation Adherents already have or should have arrived “there,” although many have failed to do so, fail to do so, and most likely (undoubtedly?) will fail to do so.

In conclusion, the question may well arise whether the icons and semi-icons do full justice to the concept of personhood, which virtually all of them endorse, be it in their own way and with more or less enthusiasm. T. William Ury is clearly not happy with Boethius' definition that centers on rationality as too static. He holds that personhood is trans-rational as well as trans-volitional (and trans-emotional?). In the footsteps of Richard of St. Victor, he prefers to see it centered in the reciprocal, perichoretic (mystical) "love" that exists as a relational dynamic in the essence of the Tri-Personal God, and so "spills over" in created reality, all this in his search to overcome what has been designated as "the nemesis" of two Thomistic categories. The first one is the insistence to identify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit above all as *subsistent relations*, rather than as "persons" to start with. The second one is the definition of "personhood" as merely an "individual *rational* substance." See Ury, TP, 263-280, 295-298. But the plot thickens, also for Ury, once it is recognized that "love" is an emotion, which is intertwined with, and cannot be separated from the rational and the volitional. So, what possible rationale could there be to exclude the rational and the volitional from any consideration? This suggests that the concept of personhood must be widened and should at least have a threefold core as being co-rational, co-volitional and co-emotional (Beeke, RST, I, 931-932, basically argues that central to "personhood" are "relations among persons of a *rational* and *volitional* nature," but implies an emotional dimension when he adds that "relationships between persons are good insofar as these persons know and love each other," with reference to John 5:20 and 16:13-15). However, if it is "the image of God" that makes up "personhood," it must be even wider. The image of God is man's spirituality, his non-materiality, breathed into man by God himself (Gen. 2:7). This consists of the heart as man's life-mission control center with its three internal functions of thinking, willing and feeling, its two dimensions of holiness and social interaction, its creative imagination, and its twofold display of speaking and acting.

Of course, this literally *propels* a further question. How in the world does such a multi-layered "immanent" concept relate to Divine "Transcendence?" This is already a problem when personhood is narrowed down to a combination of rationality, volition, and emotion, or narrowed even more to just "love?" Hence, the spoken or unspoken unease of all current "conceivers" of whatever kind of personhood! After all, however this is defined, it must be "analogical" in nature, whether "mildly" or "strongly" so. As such, it defies all univocity and must be essentially and ultimately be "non-informative." This also applies to Richard St. Victor's and Ury's "perichoretic 'love,'" which they incidentally do not and cannot define, and such by definition!

Frankly, from my perspective Scripture informs us about personhood in the many-layered riches as I just described it and as I embrace it *in toto*. So, I must have an even wider and therefore thornier problem than the others who narrowed it down. After all, I do have a larger number of concepts that are either strongly or mildly analogical, that is, either more empty or less empty of any "bull's eye" information when it pertains to God. Hence "my" thornier problem! So, what is my solution? Thankfully, and serendipitously (?), I have no problem at all, none whatsoever. I have surrendered myself to the complementarity of God's truth as this is revealed in and transmitted by his inerrant Word in the Scriptures of the OT and the NT. What an astounding riches opens up this way! I do not communicate with the Triune God as a "subsistent relation," nor merely as a "rational entity," or even as undefined and undefinable (!) "love." I can and do communicate with God as he reveals himself in his Trinitarian Tri-Personality. He communicates with me, and I with him, on a personal basis, and in a personal way, that is, from person to person, from heart to heart, from mind to mind, from will to will, from emotion to emotion, in a setting of holiness and social interaction, in my creative imagination, and in my speaking and acting. How all this stacks up to God's transcendence is none of my business, none of my curiosity, none of preoccupation, none of my speculation, and none of my temptation to give it even any investigative thought. It is out of bounds. Period! Both by Divine Essence and by Divine Fiat! As such, it does not, cannot, and will not elicit any entrepreneurial activity on my part to scrutinize it, delve in it to make it intelligible. It is one of God's incomprehensible "secrets." So, to touch it or to look into it, is tantamount to touching or looking into the Ark of God. The outcome is both self-defeating and self-destructive (1 Sam. 6:19; 2 Sam. 6:6-7). This may well explain the endlessly littered landscape, if not burnt-over territory as the legacy of the philosophical, the theological, the theologico-philosophical, or philosophico-theological icons, semi-icons, or non-icons who either saddled themselves with, or simply inherited, or opted for a *contrastive* view of Transcendence and Immanence and put (all ?) their eggs of time and energy in their more or less Herculean and Sisyphean (!) efforts to get a handle on or once and for all settle their incomprehensible relationship. That is, rather than lodging incomprehensible complementarity in one's regenerate heart that comes with mental, volitional, emotional, moral, social, entrepreneurial, speaking and acting *shalom*. This simultaneously functions as a rich and enriching launching pad of time and energy to have all one's eggs hatch in the basket of the embrace and pursuit of the Triple Command of our Commander-in-Chief! Let us face the utterly grim reality. If all language, including the language of Scripture is, by definition, "analogical," it is always lacking in, and essentially void

of information, also by definition. The end is at best a non-descript and non-verifiable “mysticism,” a vanishing in the mist, if not fog of an ever receding, non-existing point of so-called synthesis that brings about a Church without the Inerrant Word to be proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit. To underscore this once more, since the Trinitarian God, in whom universality and particularity simultaneously and harmoniously co-exist, is *the* ultimate, foundational metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical reality, there is no such thing as a singular concentration point. Such concentration point only exists in the figment of the “empty and deceitful” imagination of apostate thinkers. So, all attempts to look for or establish one are endeavors that are both completely foolish, like finding or constructing a bridge into nowhere, which elicits “the derisive laughter” of God” (Ps. 2:4). It is also deeply offensive, while seeking to move above and so supersede the Triune God, which evokes his wrath (Ps. 2:5). No wonder his insistent and compassionate summons for all rulers, ideological and otherwise, to fear him (Ps. 2:11), to “kiss his Son” (Ps. 2:12a), to find shalom refuge in him (Ps. 2:12c), leave all foolish “emptiness” and offensive “deceit” behind (Col. 2:8), or to face his wrath and perish (Ps. 2:12b).

At any rate, to continue with foolish offensiveness and offensive foolishness in this context, which ends up in the quagmire of “reigning (non-informative) analogy” is to make the Church’s internal secularization inescapable and the remedy for the World’s external secularization impossible. After all, this adds up to (1) no radically trustworthy Full-Gospel proclamation “on the outside,” and (2) no totally trustworthy Full-Word proclamation “on the inside!” At best, an essentially downgraded and so an inconsistent truncated Gospel and Word! So, we may well ask *the* (only?) relevant question. What (in blazes?) does the Church come to, if it is (philosophically) (1) in a perennial doubt about the glorious truth value of the Gospel and the Word, which God has entrusted to both, and (2) in an equally perennial bind to determine this value when it proclaims either one? That all this calls for, in fact, doubles down upon the need for a *Gospel-apologetics* to bring about an experienced and activating *shalom*-on-effective-display in terms of souls, prayerfully-won (Mt. 6:10a; 28:19) and of holiness, prayerfully-advanced (Mt. 6:10b; 28:20), goes without saying!

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At any rate, in his *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 1-43, Aquinas espouses the “sacred doctrine” of what is known as “The perfectly simple Triune God” with his immutability as a foregone conclusion.²⁰⁶ To start out (Q. 1- 26) he goes to great and intricate length to set forth the tandem of God as “perfectly simple,” covering his “simplicity and perfection” together with their “inescapable” correlates, such as, his immateriality, his impassibility, his immutability, his infinity, his eternity, etc., which, as we shall see, necessarily follow in the wake of this tandem.²⁰⁷ Although “sacred doctrine” is (and should be) “hospitable to philosophy to help manifest its truth,” the latter is not deemed to be “necessary” and definitely “does not

²⁰⁶ See for the following summary, Long, PSTG, 3-62, 68, esp. 9-11, 30-31, 68.

²⁰⁷ Scholars have frequently called attention to the “fecundity” of this tandem, in that it “literally” spawned all other corresponding attributes, such as immutability, eternity, etc., and determined their relationship. The definition of “simplicity” is the necessary and sufficient condition for both. This doctrine denies any form of composition in God. Hence immutability, eternity, etc. Further, all distinctions are taboo. No distinction between God’s existence and his essence, nor between his attributes and his essence, nor between one attribute and another attribute. Divine “perfection” solidifies this. It informs us that all this is permanent and unalterable. In short, in a perfect God all attributes do and must fall in line with “simplicity” and as such are and must be synonymous. This, of course, raises the question how God’s Tri-personality “rhymes” with his simplicity that does not allow parts or composition. This receives or attention below. But for now, Aquinas’ commitment to this Tri-personality on theological and traditional grounds ensures that the God of Aquinas is not an abstract and bare reality (Herewith he “upends” Aristotle; Long PSTG, 98). It secures that he (1) is a perfect being, full of life, wisdom, goodness, love, etc., “more so than any other” (because of its substantive, essential simplicity!) and (2) displays all this in dynamic action. Ex. 3:14 indicates the former and John 14:6 the latter. “Together they identify God’s nature and agency” (Long, PSTG, 23-24, 69-80, 111, esp. 69, 79, 111).

condition it.”²⁰⁸ Consequently, Aquinas set out, while taking his fundamental clue from the doctrinal “simplicity and perfection” edifice that was already more than a millennium old, squarely based upon sacred Scripture and firmly secured in the ecclesiastical tradition,²⁰⁹ and recognizing the helpful presence of “philosophical knowledge,” which allowed him to make use of the iconic Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus, (once and for all?) to solidify this edifice, if not set it in concrete. He did so with numerous quotations from Scripture (339x) as foundational, with his equally numerous references to Augustine (240x) and Dionysius (67x) as embodying the tradition, and by frequently mentioning Aristotle as well (114x), although allegedly the latter not at all in a commanding capacity.

This, of course, should be a potent reminder that Aquinas does not seek to lay an independent, overarching philosophical “simplicity and perfection” foundation (that would settle the “one essence of God”), only *subsequently* to proceed to a super-structural

²⁰⁸ See for this also M. W. F. Stone and Robert Wisnovsky, “Philosophy and Theology,” in Pasnau, CHMP, II, 694, 696, “In the (medieval) faculty of theology, theories and arguments gleaned from the text of Aristotle and some others were utilized and then placed in the service of *sacred doctrina*.” In “the works of Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, Durand of St. Pourcain, Peter Auriol, Robert Holcot, Ockham, we find there a profound illustration of the range and diversity of the engagement of medieval theologians with the Aristotelian inheritance, especially the *Organon*, and also a deep commitment to utilize rational thought for the analysis, clarification, and vindication of dogmatic truth.”

²⁰⁹ According to Aquinas, unconditional acceptance of “the tradition” of the Church is inescapable. Since in his view the Scriptures are not “perspicuous” (Long, PSGT, 79), this “tradition” is and must be an indispensable anchor point. Since the early Church was committed to the biblical doctrine of simplicity, but was also enamored by the philosophical one, it may well be that Aquinas confused the two. His uncritical (?) use of philosophical (Aristotelian) considerations in defense of simplicity makes this a reasonable assumption. That he is capable of such confusion is evident from his defense of the doctrine of “transubstantiation.” See for this also Mastricht, TPT, I, 85. He decries the fact that Aquinas “augmented dreadful philosophical terms to an enormous extent.” Even Aristotle and others “began to be considered equal to the Scriptures, if not preferred over them.” This is undeniable in the present instance. However, with the documentation of the pervasive influence of “the philosopher,” it appears that the camel is in the tent, and not just his nose. According to James Doig, “Aquinas and Aristotle,” in OHA, 40, “The dependence of Aquinas’s theology on the philosophy of Aristotle appears in two forms. One is the evident application of Aristotle’s doctrines or concepts; the other, not as noticeable, is the application of the method Aquinas found proper to Aristotle’s metaphysician.” This points to Aquinas’ “high regard” for Aristotle. Doig bases Aquinas’s fascination with the philosophy of Aristotle upon “one of his strongest convictions,” that is, “of the impossibility that error can arise from the correct use of the cognitive abilities given by God.” For this see also Martin Pickave, “Human Knowledge,” in OHA, 313, “In general we can expect our cognitive capacities to lead us to cognition and knowledge. For why would we have cognitive capacities such as the senses and the intellect if they did not convey to us cognition about the world around us,” and Dominik Perler, “Skepticism and Metaphysics,” in OHMP, 555, “Aquinas emphasizes that our judgments are in principle correct because they are formed by an intellect that is designed to function correctly.” Due to “the intellect in the image of God we have the cognitive means we need to recognize things as they really are.” “Given that our cognitive apparatus has a natural function that it fulfils correctly under normal circumstances, errors and deceptions are exceptional cases that can be detected and corrected.” “This is based on a number of metaphysical principles that serves as an overall anti-skeptical framework. This framework allows for *local* doubts about the correctness of this or that judgment, but not for *global* doubt.” Of course, this assessment of the intellect was at the least incomplete in the eyes of the Reformers. That there is a created pre-established harmony between the metaphysical make-up of individuals and their external world, which allows for knowledge acquisition through a combination of the mind and the senses was gladly acknowledged. But that the intellect ethically escaped the total depravity that accompanied the fall was strongly contested, even if some Post-Reformation dogmaticians “understood the fall as having less impact on the faculty of reason” than was generally held. For this see also, Muller, PRRD, I, 279, 298-299. Incidentally, the “bottom-up” approach fits snugly in Aquinas’ Aristotelian conviction that “nothing is in the intellect that has not previously been in the senses.” “The senses provide the intellect with the basic ‘raw material’ for higher level cognitive activity” (Pickave, OHA, 314-315).

revelational theology (that then and only then would display his *Tri*-personality”),²¹⁰ No rigid division between *De Deo Uno* (unity of essence) and the *De Deo Trino* (diversity in three persons) and therefore no effort to establish a “natural theology” as the foundation for a “supernatural” one!

But, according to our Aquinas’ interpreter, there is more, much more, that appeared to have escaped most folks who quote Aquinas’s “simplicity and perfection” exposition with approval and adopt his reasoning.²¹¹ It was *precisely* his *revelational* theology, even more precisely his Trinitarian theology (Qu. 27-43), which is central in his thinking, both as the already biblically and ecclesiastically embraced point to start from and his avowedly conclusive and indisputably settled goal to arrive at, that prompted his embrace of simplicity. In short, it was precisely the theological and ecclesiastical *De Deo Trino* truth that gave rise to the philosophico-theological treatment of the *De Deo Uno*!²¹² This is to say, it was the very Doctrine of the Trinity that caused (compelled?) him to solidify, in fact, once and for all to nail down the already age-long existing “grammar” of the biblical and traditional “simplicity and perfection” doctrine. In turn, “simplicity, and all that flows forth from it (in fact, *must* follow from it, *perfection, immutability, infinity, eternity, unity*), served the surprising purpose of *making sense* (italics, mine) of divine Trinity.”²¹³ After all, this doctrine does and would once and for all exclude that God is a composite, made up of parts, or displays unacceptable “distinctions, such as, matter/form, potentiality/act, essence/nature, essence/existence, genius/difference and substance/accidents.”²¹⁴ The reciprocal “movement,” from *De Deo Trino* to *De Deo Uno* and vice versa, is in unmistakable evidence.

The pivotal rub, of course, is the place and function of the philosophical menu that Aquinas brought to the theological table. There is and should be no doubt that Aquinas must have been fully persuaded that this menu was God’s chosen instrument once and for all to undergird, in fact, indisputably to establish as unshakable truth what was on the table, namely the Doctrine of the *Tri-unity* of God, and to set it systematically and apologetically in unchallengeable steel-enforced concrete. “No composite God!” Therefore, “No Tri-theism!” “One God in Three Persons!” His expressed aim was in this way to provide full-proof spiritual instruction and enduring nourishment for the faithful. That he in view of his intended, most likely unsophisticated target audience calls his (catechetical?) expositions “milk” (!) rather than “meat,” in obvious reference to Hebrews 5:12, only underscores that

²¹⁰ Fesko, 71-96, has severely criticized Cornelius Van Til of going this “independent, autonomous, natural theology route” in his interpretation of Aquinas. In this he is correct. For this, see also Bavinck, RD, I, 145, “Child-like faith was the starting point of scholasticism,” even if this faith extended itself to the tradition of the Church as well as to Scripture. But Fesko (as well as Bavinck? And even Muller?) failed properly to analyze and assess the *function* and *nature* of Aquinas’ philosophical considerations in his rational theology. More about this necessarily questionable, if not potentially damaging feature, below. It is one thing properly and effectively to criticize a mistaken analysis why a ship is sinking. But it is another thing to overlook that the ship is sinking, if this is the case, and as a result to stay on board, and to invite others to do the same, or to join up. All this simply goes to say that we must dig deep in the nature of Aquinas’ “ship,” and definitely deeper than staying “above the waterline.”

²¹¹ See for this especially, Long, PSTG, 22-23. He singles out Dolezal who insists on “simplicity as the ontologically sufficient condition for God’s absoluteness,” which becomes “intelligible” vis-à-vis God’s relation to a *complex* creation. Aquinas, on the other hand, insists on “simplicity first and foremost to make sense of the divine processions” in his Trinitarian being.

²¹² So correctly. Long, PSTG, xxii.

²¹³ Long, PSTG, 21, 23.

²¹⁴ Long, PSTG, 25. It is difficult not to recognize the Aristotelian mold, which is alien to Scripture.

he believes them to be unassailable (who would fight ‘milk?’),²¹⁵ and therefore would checkmate outside gainsayers as well!

At any rate, all this is said to indicate how Aquinas arrived at “The Perfectly Simple Triune God.”²¹⁶ From a clearly *revealed* Trinitarian theology through necessary Divine simplicity, nailed down by substantive philosophical reasoning with unmistakable historical precedent (Augustine and Dionysius), to a fully and irrefutably *established* Trinitarian theology. Candidly, it looks like that this seals the deal. No philosophical infestation! Be it with the solidifying *assistance* of a philosophical “handmaiden,” Aquinas simply moved from revealed Biblical truth (Trinity) through argued Biblical truth (simplicity) to demonstrated Biblical truth (Trinity)! Clean bill of health! So, “Case Closed!”²¹⁷ Not so incidentally, this would also be sufficient ground once and for all to dismiss the indefensible charge that Aquinas espouses a “natural theology” as an independent infrastructure for the subsequent superstructure of “revealed theology.”²¹⁸

However, it is quite clear that this well-argued verdict is not universally accepted as the total and therefore final word in the matter. Even if there is much truth in this Aquinas’ interpretation, there are at least *four* lines of argument that question its ultimate validity in one way or another. This calls for our attention in the next Section. It also would (should?) settle (again, once and for all?) whether, or not Thomist scholasticism can be reduced to a mere academic method rather than represents a content that can and must be analyzed and assessed biblically, all protestations to the contrary.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ See for this, Long, PSTG, 66, as well as Timothy Pawl, “The Five Ways,” in OHA, 116, “The *Summa* was written as a theological textbook for students just beginning their theological training,” although it has been suggested that they already had been exposed to an “undergraduate” schooling in philosophy. At any rate, there is a case to be made that it was written for the formation of priests who were not going into academia, “young and run-of-the-mill Dominicans.” A “rough” parallel to Aquinas’ so-called “introductory” volume is a hefty publication by John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. The latter is written for clearly unsophisticated incoming Seminary students as well. For those with sense of humor, neither “Introduction” resembles “milk” very much!

²¹⁶ For this, see especially, Long, PSTG, 383ff.

²¹⁷ Once again, for this summary, see Long, PSTG, 3-62, 68, esp. 9-11, 30-31, 68.

²¹⁸ There is every reason to support this “dismissal.” As argued by Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages: An Introduction,” CPMA, 1, 3, “Most of the philosophy that we find (in the Middle Ages) is contained in books of theology and used to elucidate theological doctrine.” That is, in the words of Aquinas, as an “*ancilla theologiae*, a servant of theology.” “The distinguishing mark of Latin philosophy in the Middle Ages is to be found in its double aim: the understanding of the Christian faith and its defense against those who attacked it. The effort at understanding produced theological works (such as, Aquinas’ ST); the effort at defense produced apologetic works (such as, Aquinas’ ScG).” Even the “solutions” that were adopted for purely philosophical problems “were often governed by the doctrinal principles they wished to defend. In this sense, philosophy was generally subordinated to theology and apologetics.” This gives credence to Fesko’s critique of Cornelius Van Til’s interpretation of Aquinas as a promoter of “natural theology” (RA, 73-96, esp. 75, 80-81). It also justifies Muller’s extensive three-part rather blistering criticism of K. Scott Oliphant who echoes Van Til in his (at least partly) misguided assessment of Aquinas (Reformation 21, January, February-March, 2018).

²¹⁹ Gracia, “Philosophy in the Middle Ages, An Introduction,” in CPMA, 2, 4, 5 provides evidence that in scholasticism method and content are inseparably intertwined. “Scholasticism is a method of teaching and learning used in several disciplines, particularly philosophy and theology ... The aim of the method was to yield knowledge concordant with both human reason and the Christian faith, a *concordia discordantium* of opinions which the medievals regarded as authoritative. The method was practiced in the medieval university and used Aristotelian logic as a tool.” It also endorses, if not encourages “the use of secular learning ... as long as it is concordant with Christian doctrine and is done in the context of faith.” The latter paves the way for content scholasticism and makes it inevitable! This is underscored by Aquinas when he “argues that some truths can be known through either faith or reason (e.g., God

V. The Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas (II)

The *first* line of argument that Aquinas should not be given a virtual clean bill of health relates to the widespread belief among theologians of various stripes, of course, in Aquinas' footsteps, that the acceptance, if not the necessary embrace of philosophical truth (content) and philosophical considerations (method) as a helpful "handmaiden" to establish one's doctrinal stance, is sanctioned by Paul's statement that all of mankind have an indubitable knowledge of God (Rom. 1:19-21).²²⁰ This is construed as positive, truthful, and therefore useful knowledge and allows them to utilize philosophers, such as, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, as reliable guides in the areas of the truth that they discovered.²²¹ Even if this were only correct up to a point, it is certainly quite proper, and even helpful, if not needful, to welcome their input, also, if not especially in the area of divine "simplicity" and all that this concept entails in terms of God's perfection, immutability, eternity, etc. After all, these philosophers (already) subscribed to all this (as a package deal). In short, regarding these doctrines the ancient philosophers represented for all practical purposes a pre-Christian

exists)." That this is content scholasticism (with a vengeance?) is clear on the face of it. Reason can come up with right propositions. However, in Scripture we are in a different ballpark. It states that all of mankind knows God *already before any rational argument is presented* and suppresses this knowledge in ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-20). Aristotelian "theism" has all the earmarks of rebellious suppression stamped upon it. Just look at its failed end-product. Semi-Pelagian Thomism cannot but be blind to this. Rather than to recognize the need for, if not issue a summons to repentance, it puts this blindness on display in a twofold way. It resorts to reason to argue the existence of God, as if mankind does *not* know him (!). Further, it seeks to do so by adopting the very (Aristotelian) "theism" that stands in need of repentance into its theological and apologetic arsenal. But more about this below! See yet Timothy B. Noone, "Scholasticism," in CPMA, 55, (1) for the so-called essential *concordia* between "the insights of philosophy with theological teaching (the principle of the harmony of faith and reason," 56, (2) for the looming shadow of content scholasticism, "Scholasticism is nearly unintelligible apart from the institutions in which (both) theology and philosophy were taught and the changing and novel (!) influences to which thinkers during this time were subject," and 61, (3) for an "increasing attention to collections of Patristic theological opinions" beyond (!) "their lectures on the Bible." See also Timothy Pawl, "The Five Ways," in OHA, 115-125, for an insightful analysis and assessment of Aquinas' bottom-up "demonstrations" of the existence of God. Charles H. Lohr, "The Ancient Philosophical Legacy and its Transmission in the Middle Ages," in CPMA, 17-18, points out not only that "the Aristotelian system of the sciences was decisive for the medieval university," but also that by means of this system the focus changed from "the notion of the truth possessed" (ecclesiastically) "to the notion of the truth to be sought" (philosophically and scientifically). What a decisive difference with the Reformation on two fronts. The latter's approach is "From the truth possessed in Scripture (and recognized by from the heart by the regenerating operation of the Spirit) to the Truth proclaimed." Its starting point is not the Church (such as in Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham), but *Sola Scriptura*. Its objective is not to arrive at truth rationally, but to absorb it spiritually (of course, through a responsible hermeneutics). The question may well be asked whether Post-Reformation orthodoxy fully grasped this!

²²⁰ For this assessment by Aquinas, see especially Long, PSTG, 10, with reference to *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1,6.

²²¹ See for this, Long, PSTG, xxv, in settling Divine simplicity, which "he found in the Bible ... and in the Church fathers," Thomas also "drew on philosophy and non-Christian authors for his answer." See further, Long, PSTG, 69, for Aquinas' use of Aristotle "to clarify and manifest sacred doctrine (!)," and, 89, for Lombard's and Aquinas' positive views of their philosophical icons. Wolterstorff, IG, 283-303, weighs in on this as well.

Christianity, content, method and all.²²² By and large all those who jump on the Aquinas' bandwagon either explicitly agree or implicitly side with this "positive" interpretation of Paul's statement.²²³ Even if they recognize a suppression dimension in his teaching (Rom. 1:18, 21-23), this does not play a significant, let alone a decisive role in their writings.²²⁴

Of course, the alternate interpretation in which (negative) pagan suppression trumps (positive) pagan truth value is extremely consequential. Whatever "truth" apostate

²²² "The language of simplicity and its necessary correlates ... is *both* a species of philosophical knowledge ... and revealed wisdom that manifests how God is Triune," even with the caveat that "what (philosophical) reason alone presents of God will easily mislead because it is known only by a few and is always 'mixed with many errors,' and therefore stands in need of 'the (revealed) Trinity to establish the context to know how God is and is not, simple, immutable, perfect, and so on'" (So, Long, PSTG, 8-9).

²²³ Roman Catholicism distanced itself from the Protestant teachings on total depravity and the consequent negative assessment of nature, reason, and philosophy. It preserved nature and reason with Aquinas as bulwark of its defense. So, Long, PSTG, 4. In the light of this, it may come as a surprise that Post-Reformation scholasticism made such copious use of Aquinas.

²²⁴ Fesko, RA, xii, 2, 4-5, 15, 17-20, 23-26, 27-47, 57-60, 67-69, 96, 99, 110, 118-127, 132-134, 213, 217, consistently emphasizes that the Book of Nature, inclusive of the products of pagan thinkers, supplies us with laudable contributions regarding the knowledge of God, of creation and of man, whether it is "common notions," "order of nature," "light of nature," "natural law," "natural theology." Metaphysically and epistemologically believers and unbelievers have a lot in common. The divergence is in the axiological evaluation of what they have in common. In short, the difference is not in "the truth of propositions," but in "the truth of conclusions." That is, no difference in "the field of universal knowledge." A true truth, such as "2+2=4" is shared in full by both believers and unbelievers. But a definite difference in "the ultimate significance" of this truth. In short, the "text" is identical, but not the "context," with all that this entails in terms of belief system, framework, motivation, purpose, etc. The suppression dimension is mentioned, RA, xiii, 14, 15, 38, 65, 218. But all too sparingly. However, in Scripture (Rom, 1:18) and the Reformed Creeds, such as the Canons of Dort (III/IV,4), it has the first and last word. In both, the negative trumps the positive. Besides, the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology, on the one hand, and axiology, on the other, may be a little too neat. If Jam. 3:7b, 15b, 17 is taken into consideration, the (unregenerate) "wisdom" from below will invariably have to be characterized as "poisonous" and "devilish" in contrast to the regenerate wisdom from above, which is pure. This dovetails with Gen. 6:5, which insists that the wickedness of all humans extend itself to everything they thought or imagined as consistently and totally evil. There is no ray of light in anything mankind either is or produces. All its thoughts emerge from rebel hearts and are only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). This explains the Flood which wipes out everyone and everything. In short, even the correct mathematical proposition of 2+2=4, apart from Jesus is godless and ungodly. Without him we cannot even acceptably count to ten (John 15:5). Anything that comes from below is fully evil, metaphysically, epistemologically as well as axiologically, and can only be pure if it comes from "above" (Jam. 3:15, 17; Col. 3:1). There is not a trace of all this in Fesko's volume. In my estimation, if it had been there, it would have shown up in a clearly expressed emphasis upon the indisputable need of a burden for souls in their utter and total darkness and for their holiness upon conversion. Not so incidentally, Frame, *The Escondido Theology*, 144, in his Review of David Van Drunen, *A Biblical Defense of Natural Law*, takes this author to task for "not making reference to the unbeliever's suppression of the truth that Paul so clearly describes in Romans 1:18-32." Although Van Drunen mentions it once, in extolling "the positive values of natural law he seems to have forgotten it entirely." He treats "natural law as a straightforward, practical revelation about all things secular." Frankly, when the positive prevails, the suppression must, by definition, die an untimely death. Frame's analysis is excellent, but he may well give the ball game away when he, 145, states as his "conviction that there is such a thing as natural law." Carl Henry, *God Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 394, correctly states "that no universally shared system of truth or morality has survived since man's fall into sin." In his, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1985), 118, he adds that "No universally shared system of morality has survived the fall of humanity." According to his *Twilight of a Great Civilization* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 152, the view "that a universal shared body of law and ethics survived the Fall as a present possession of humankind" is profoundly mistaken. See for this also, J. Douma, *Common Grace* (Hamilton, ON: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017), 255-260. Let me hasten to add that all this does not deny the "positive" and "encouraging" side of God's "common graces." But for a detailed treatment of their vast range, their precise nature, and their manifold purpose, see below.

philosophers would come up with, would be such only “in *name* and in *sound*,” and categorically *not* “in *quintessence* or in *substance*” (Remember Bavinck). Therefore, they stand in immediate need of repentance! Concretely, the suppression would ensure that their philosophical concepts, inclusive of “simplicity,” “immutability,” etc., etc., would be poles apart from the biblical concepts, and should not even come into the picture in one’s efforts to get to the truth of Scripture!²²⁵ The encounter with such philosophers would be antithetical rather than synthetic.²²⁶ This clearly was the approach Paul took when he called them and their ilk “utter fools” (Rom. 1:22, so NLT), characterized their ideas as “foolish” (Rom. 1:21) and their views as “empty deceit” (Col. 2:8), and summoned them to repentance precisely to undo the damage caused by their *substantive* intrinsic suppression of the *nominally* expressed knowledge that they incontestably possessed, which not so incidentally would decisively bar them from Kingdom fellowship (Acts 17:27-30; Rom. 1:23).²²⁷ Hence not just Paul’s weeping summons (Phil. 3:18) to repentance (Acts 17:30c), but also his undoubtedly tearful reference to the command of God himself to repent (Acts 17:30b; see also Ezek. 18:30b)! The command of a God, who does not delight in the death of sinners (Ezek. 18:32), but rather loved worldlings so much that he gave his only begotten Son to rescue them (John 3:16), and in his patience delays his return to keep the door open for folks to escape perishing through repentance (2 Pet. 3:9)! Candidly, none of this Pauline (convicting) approach and (tearful) attitude is in evidence in Aquinas, or his adherents for that matter. For him Aristotle and his devoted (metaphysical) followers are not (first of all) “perishing souls,” who stood or stand in need of repentance for suppressing the manifest truth and the subsequent knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18-21). No, Aristotle is and remains “*the* (celebrated) philosopher” who needs to be followed.²²⁸ Passing strange! Even if his “logic” is nominally correct, his metaphysics fully deserves the designation of “suppression.”

Not so incidentally, the *pre-dominant* Pauline suppression motif is dominant in Calvin as well.²²⁹ Bavinck also echoes Paul, when he, as we already saw, stated that “a common

²²⁵ See Beeke, RST, I, 208, 219, 250, 259, 687, “There is an immense contrast between Plato’s supreme good or Aristotle’s unmoved mover and the omniscient, omnipotent, and immutable God of creation and providence—the sovereign triune God revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

²²⁶ The negative view is also found in Augustine’s volume on *The Trinity*, Bk. 13.19.

²²⁷ Mastricht, TPT, II, 149, fully echoes Paul in his statement that “The Philosophers are condemned because, though they knew his deity, they did not therefore glorify him as God (Rom. 1:20-21).”

²²⁸ This apparently (and gratefully) does not go over too well with Turretin, IET, I, 46. He decries for “philosophy to assume to itself the office of a master in articles of faith, not content with that of a servant, *as was done by the Scholastics who put Aristotle on the throne* (italics, mine)!” He most likely does not refer to his creaturely acceptable “logic and rhetoric,” but rather to his unacceptably sinful “metaphysics and ethics.”

²²⁹ See for this extensively, Douma, *Common Grace*, 233-283, esp. 238-243). Dr. J. Klapwijk, “Calvin on Non-Christian Philosophy,” in *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1973), 44-49, weighs in on this as well. Calvin held to the doctrine of the *corruptio totalis* which implied (versus Medieval Scholasticism) (1) that ~~also~~ human reason was radically perverted, and (2) that its light (*lumen naturale*) turned out to be essentially “blind” (Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 1, 13). However, this does not deny the copious presence of human knowledge and achievements in earthly affairs, such as in the arts and sciences, as veritable gifts of God. Although invariably tainted with sin, they serve as God’s “common graces.” Their purpose is to display God’s kindness in the manifold “pluses” in life, to bring about an ever-ongoing restraint of sin, and to exhibit God’s determination to find them inexcusable in the face of his self-manifestation. Douma still adds that they also constitute a magnanimous invitation to know God and greatly facilitate the ministry of the Church. But neither one emphasizes that they also embody a summons to repentance (Rom. 2: 6), which, incidentally, is rarely heeded. Most likely because the Church routinely fails (refuses?) to “verbalize” them as such?

terminological *sound*” should not be confused with “a common factual *substance*!”²³⁰ So, here is the first line of argument. Aquinas does not see or realize that apostate metaphysical and epistemological *content* philosophy, starting with the unacceptable bottom-up approach, turns into a poisonous Trojan Horse, if, and when its substance (even if in part) is incorporated in one’s theology. There is an unbridgeable gap between such philosophy of “empty deceit” and a truly Scriptural theology in terms of motivation, content, and objective.²³¹ This, incidentally, is more than echoed in and trumpeted by Tertullian, whom we will meet more extensively below! Frankly, we may well wonder whether Aquinas and his followers ever would be able to develop a tearful Pauline burden for the (rebel) souls of those whom they quote with such admiration and such gusto as well as for the (gullible?) souls of those who “religiously” celebrate them (Rom. 9:2; 10:1; Phil. 3:18). There must be something basically wrong with any theological enterprise that lacks a weeping component, even with such enterprise that admittedly and understandably wants “to get it right.”

At any rate, we now can turn immediately to a closely, if not intimately related *second* line of argument that accentuates all this and gives it feet. It is, indeed, recognizable that Aquinas “simply” seeks to set forth truth that appears to be already perennial since it dates all the way back to Augustine, and Dionysius, and possibly beyond.²³² No contest! However, a pivotal question arises that digs a little deeper. What is the source of Augustine’s, and especially Dionysius’ doctrinal edifice that Aquinas embraces so consistently and with such approval? From where did he get it in the first place? A suggested answer is that he inherited it from a supposedly “helpful” philosopher, namely Plotinus who with his vision of reality may well have produced the crowning piece of Ancient Philosophy. In his effort to radicalize Aristotle’s ontology he posited an ultimate reference point, namely a so-called

²³⁰ We see J. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 30-31, take a similar, if not the same approach when he compares the concept of “persuasion” as it occurs in both Aristotle and Scripture. The two poles of Planet Earth could not be farther apart than this concept in both its Aristotelian and Biblical contexts. Writes Dabney, “Aristotle incorrectly classes orations under three *genera*: of the Statesman, of the Advocate, and of the Eulogist. The object of the first is always to cause the election or rejection of a given course of action. That of the second is to procure a verdict of acquittal or condemnation. That of the third, not so obviously active, is really so, for it aims to gain a moral verdict by which the hearer (mentally) adopts the subject as his approved model of virtue. Aristotle knew nothing of our nobler department, that of evangelical eloquence. We may more clearly decide upon this *that its end is always action of the soul in the hearer, repentance, faith, or some other duty* (italics, mine).” Not even the impeccable presence of the three components that Aristotle prescribes for effective persuasion, namely *ethos* (character of “the persuader”), *pathos* (construal of “the one to be persuaded”) and *logos* (the message “to convey the persuasion”) (can “soar” to the biblically necessary level of Dabney’s “evangelical eloquence” as long as it *merely* aims “for an audience “to identify itself with a particular position,” “to impel (it) toward a particular point of view,” or to make “a (mental) commitment to a message.” Incidentally, this threefold aim of “persuasion” is at length and uncritically recommended by K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 147, 158. In doing so, he champions an apologetics that essentially aims at mental agreement rather than at a heart transplant. He is strongly critical of Aquinas in the footsteps of Cornelius Van Til, and even in a more muted way of Van Til himself, by “side-stepping,” if not (altogether) relinquishing the notion of “absolute proof,” presented as “the (undeniable) impossibility of the contrary” to Christianity. His “neo-presuppositional” alternative comes in the form of “Persuasionism.” But retaining mental agreement as his objective he is basically one the many *feindliche Bruder*, hostile brothers. The explicit fact that his apologetics does “not aim at conversion” (Oliphint, CA, 159) speaks volumes. In fact, it justifies the present conclusion. But more about the biblical target of the apologetic enterprise in necessary detail below.

²³¹ See Beeke, RST, I, 219, for a quotation from David K. Clark, “In using the categories of alien philosophy and surrounding culture a theologian risks a simplistic appropriation of the alien values embedded in the DNA of these categories.”

²³² See for this also, Fesko, RA, 74-81.

“unconditioned condition of everything not identical with itself,” which was designated as his “godhead.” As we shall see more in detail below, this “godhead” functioned as the transcendental source and condition for the emergence of both universality and particularity.²³³ Since it conceptually transcends everything and gives rise to everything, it also is and must be beyond all knowing and speaking. Hence, he gave “it” the label of the unknowably unknown Supreme and the unspoken nameless One. With this he undoubtedly radicalized Aristotle’s ontology. But he did not do away with it. On the contrary, his beef with Aristotle was that the latter was not able to synthesize universality and particularity because he did not go far enough “back,” to the originating Source of both. So, he did (had to) “invent” a speculative transcendent and transcendental *concentration* point that supposedly would “overarch” and give rise to both Aristotle’s form-matter dialectic with Pure Form, the Absolute Universal at the top,²³⁴ and Pure Matter, the Brute Particular at the bottom of his Chain of Being.²³⁵ This concentration point, which (necessarily) eluded Aristotle, defies cognition and can only be (mystically?) envisioned, could not possibly be a composite.²³⁶ It had to be perfect in its simplicity and simple in its perfection, and therefore

²³³ Remember Copleston’s thesis that the total Western Philosophical enterprise seeks to solve the one-and-many problem, that is, to synthesize universality and particularity ontologically, epistemologically and ethically, and, I add, is a total failure in arriving at this objective as well.

²³⁴ Ury, TP, 73, argues that in Aristotle “Existing as the highest in Being did not necessarily mean that God was equal to a universal,” “unqualified being,” “immutable essence, bequeathed by the Platonic tradition.” But he concedes that Aristotle is “haphazard” in this, since “there are places where he seems to vacillate.” However, it certainly does not appear to be a “majority report.” Candidly, Aristotle’s inability, as we saw, to overcome the *choresis* between contrastive Form and Matter militates against this interpretation.

²³⁵ The concept of the Absolute (or the One) is shared by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. Bavinck, RD, II, 120-121, stipulates that this philosophical “Absolute” is not even in the same ballpark with what Scripture teaches and the Church confesses about God. Philosophy obtains the Absolute by abstraction. After stripping off everything that is unique in each existing thing, it leaves us with “a being without content,” that is, with absolutely “nothing.” Scripture and the Church “never describe God apart from his attributes.” They teach and confess him in his “total fullness,” existence, attributes, and all. “Hence the being ascribed to God is not an abstraction, but a living, infinitely rich and concrete Being, a Supreme Being, at once identical with supreme life, supreme truth, supreme wisdom, supreme love, etc., as Augustine repeatedly said, and hence ‘an ocean of boundless being,’” and “the sum total of all reality.” This should be a reminder that the philosophical “grammar” of the Absolute, just as the *Actus Purus-Potency* and the *Being-Becoming* one, should never be allowed to control the “language” of theologians in the handling of “Theology proper.” The philosophical Absolute is not merely without content. It does not exist. If it did, JHWH would, by definition, be a figment of the imagination and could not possibly be real. So, ban it once and for all as a “would-be” apologetic tool! See also Alston, 183, 188, for the Aristotelian “hierarchy” with “*prime matter* – *pure matter*, *pure potentiality*, which is intrinsically informed *in no way*, the ultimate substratum of all substance, at the bottom.” “It is intrinsically formless, but it is the ultimate bearer of all forms.” On the other end of the spectrum are “incorporeal substances, pure subsisting forms with *no matter* that they inform.” In Aquinas, God is pure form, that is, “God is form without matter” (Long, PSTG, 72). However, he is said to “upend” Aristotle in two ways. He stipulates that God is form (simplicity) with “distinctions” to accommodate the Trinity, and that his formal immutability is immutability with “motion” to accommodate the Trinitarian processions (and operations). In God divine “substance” and inter-trinitarian “relations” (paternity, filiation, spiration) are “equated,” something that is well beyond Aristotle’s pay-scale (Long, PSGT, 21-22, 97-98). More about this “equation” below. But for now, one is hard put to find Aristotle’s hierarchy of being in Scripture. Scripture simply does not portray creation as “down-graded” being. We will see that the way Aquinas focuses upon “relations” is questionable as well. Incidentally, as we saw, when Duns Scotus in contrast to Aquinas threw in his lot with enough “univocity” between God and man to avoid otherwise inescapable equivocity, he struck at the heart of Aristotle’s “hierarchy of being” (Dumont, in RHMP, 314).

²³⁶ What “cognition” cannot accomplish he attributes to an ecstatic “mystical vision” (a move to make his synthesis stick). “Our way takes us beyond knowing; there may be no wandering from unity; knowing and knowable must all be set aside (!); every object of thought, even the highest, we must pass by, for all that is good is later than (The One)

immutable, impassible, infinite and eternal, “an astonishing list of conclusions,” alright. It was this radicalized ontology that captured the imagination of the early Church (and specifically its mystics) and was applied to the sovereign God of the Bible. It was *He*, then, who became “the unconditioned condition of everything not identical to himself.” This set the train of thought in motion that may be in some evidence in Augustine, comes to a head in Dionysius the Areopagite, and through them in Aquinas and then also his followers. In short, so the argument goes, Aquinas became an infected victim of a pre-existing ontology when he took Augustine and especially Dionysius as his guides. This, so the argument continues, was bound to cost him dearly. This could well be substantiated in three and possibly four or five areas.

First, how does his view of simplicity, which spells oneness of essence, allow for a Trinitarian God? This weighs heavily on Aquinas for obvious reasons. It is an established doctrine. Well, rather than “simply” satisfied with and sticking to God’s Tri-personality, which he, of course, ecclesiastically endorsed, his philosophical argument was for the presence of “substantial internal relations,” which “subsist in one another” within the essence of a “Tri-relational (?)” God, in terms of (generating) *paternitas*, (generated) *filiatio*, and (spirated) *processio*.²³⁷ This does not only intertwine the unity of God (*De Deo Uno*) and

and derives from (The One) as from the sun all the light of the day ... In our writing and telling we are but urging towards it: out of discussion we call to vision (!): to those who desiring to see, we point the path; our teaching is of the road and the travelling; the seeing must be the very act of one who made this choice,” quoted in Wolterstorff, IG, 110. To me and many others, this appears to be a “desperate” attempt to arrive at the “non-arrivable!” No wonder that apart from some Medieval mystics, who were in love with the “vision” idea, and from lingering central concepts, which found their way both in various Church fathers and in Medieval scholasticism, he and his philosophy ended up in the customary philosophical burial place that he shared with all his predecessors, whom he, not so incidentally, helped bury. Of course, history repeated itself in Modern Philosophy. The “visionary pattern” of its iconic thinkers may have been retained at times (often?), and their central concepts may have continued to be influential, if not retained their stranglehold. But they and their philosophical edifices were universally dismissed as failures in their quest to arrive at an exhaustive rational accounting of all the stuff of reality without leaving any loose ends. Paul’s pointed, if not devastating diagnosis of all too human philosophies as “empty deception” does and should become increasingly attractive. After all, every so-called “Grand Theory of Everything,” whether proposed in philosophy, in theoretical physics or otherwise, that has “no possible saving effect from the wrath to come” is and must be identified as such. What Paul drove to his conclusion was not a “scathing” and “uppity” dismissal of his personal opponents and their views. No, it was a “burden for souls” who would be lost forever without the Christ, the Son of God, his offensive and laughable cross (1 Cor. 1:23) and his equally offensive and ridiculed resurrection (Acts 17:32), inclusive of the souls of iconic philosophers and scientists. In fact, he weeps over all (such) enemies of the cross (and the resurrection), because they face destruction, however much revered and “Pied-Piper-ed” by their fellowmen and their offspring throughout the centuries (Phil. 3:18-19).

²³⁷ See also Long, PSTG, 50-57. For Aquinas’ repeated focus upon “relations,” see yet, Long, PSTG, 72f-73, 85, 96-98. Gilles Emery, “The Trinity,” in OHA, 419-421, also states that the “sequence” or “cadence” in Aquinas’ philosophical argument is “processions” (generation and spiration”), then relations, and then persons, in that order! A “procession” is “the drawing out of a reality that issues from a principle.” In God, the first procession is that of the Word, who proceeds by way of intellect: this procession is properly a generation. The second procession is that of the Spirit, who proceeds by way of love.” (For an excellent treatment of the generation/spiration, their inexpressible “definition,” their equally undefinable relationship to each other, a severe critique of the scholastic mind/love sequence, a stinging rebuke of the Scholastics “who weary themselves in investigating and explaining the mode of the Son’s generation, since it is not ineffable but also incomprehensible,” and a plea to display the “wisdom of sobriety,” see Turretin, IET, I, 292-300, 308-309). In short, the processions produce the relations of paternity, filiation and spiration. In these relations two aspects must be differentiated. These relations possess the identical essence and existence: One God. But in their “opposition” to each other they are distinct: Three Persons, with “person” to be defined as “a distinct subsistent in the divine nature,” a “relation as something subsisting,” or in the footsteps of

the plurality in God (²³⁸*De Deo Trino*). It also keeps “parts” out of the equation. Although Aquinas states that these three “properties are the same as persons because the abstract and the concrete are the same in God,”²³⁹ it seems that Aquinas does not want to *argue* for “Three Persons” to start with, and that for at least two reasons. This either might give the impression that God is either a *Tri-composite* or open him up to the charge of *Tri-theism*. But the deepest reason could well be that it would jar with his Aristotelianism. Under no circumstances would Aristotle ever allow the “oneness” of his impersonal godhead (universality) be contaminated with a “manifold” (particularity).²⁴⁰ In his philosophical reasoning Aquinas might “sneak” in “relations,” but would be caught red-handed if he had tried to do that with “persons.” That would be definite “no-no.” But more about this later. At any rate, a type of reasoning that declares that a “relative property in God implies a person, be it never in creatures,”²⁴¹ has been found wanting.²⁴² It would be to superimpose an already existing traditional theological truth upon a resisting philosophical product! Besides in this instance it would be a misfit. The Aristotelian so-called “simplicity”-without-distinctions (no particularity allowed) could not possibly allow for a super-imposition of the *Biblical* simplicity-with-distinctions (Trinitarian). At any rate, merely to argue “tri-relationality,” undoubtedly to safeguard the “oneness” of simplicity (no parts) does not do it! The way Scripture repeatedly focuses upon The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit makes it crystal

Boethius as “an individual substance of a rational nature.” Thus the “doctrine of subsistent relations, which accounts for both essential unity and personal plurality in the Trinity constitutes the keystone of Aquinas’s Trinitarian doctrine.” “It falls to ‘personal relation’ (paternity, filiation, and procession), which is intrinsic to the divine person, to distinguish and constitute the person, in such a way that if we were to abstract the relations, we would no longer be able to conceive of the divine persons.” For Aquinas’ use of the term “person” as “subsistent relation,” see also Joseph W. Wawrykow, *Thomas Aquinas* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 106-108, as well as Ury, TP, 215-224, esp. 221. Aquinas adopted the definition of Boethius, “the individual substance of a rational nature,” with the understanding that the Creator-creature distinction demands that the term is used “analogously” when applied to God. Once again, Aquinas’ ambivalence, if not self-contradiction is hard to miss. His biblico-traditional ecclesiastical stance simply does not jibe with his Dionysius-fed philosophical “handmaiden.”

²³⁸ This may also be at least implied by Ury, TP, 65, 70, 75, 76, “Difficulties arose (in the treatment of the Trinity) when the fundamentally personal categories of the Judeo-Christian religion began to use (philosophical) terms which originally reflected impersonal being.” The term “substance” as applied by Aristotle to his “godhead” was not just clearly non-personal, but also “as perfect being” had to be “an absolute undifferentiated unity,” “unattached to, and unaffected by anything else,” which prompted Sabellianism to insist on its modalism, and is “fundamentally irreconcilable with Trinitarian thought.” However, his conclusion is somewhat curious, curious in its tentativeness. “Although we cannot say that Aristotelian ontology would assent to a trinitarian reality, a “substance” which admits constituents, or better, inseparably comprises in itself those elements, is a distinctly possible interpretation.” This would “admit of certain properties or modes which make up its unique reality.” The jury is clearly still out on this. But if this is even a remotely possible interpretation, it would explain why Aquinas could earmark the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as “relations,” and post-Reformation orthodoxy could present them as “modes of subsistence” without (unconsciously) violating, if not (consciously) aiming not to violate the thinking of “the philosopher.”

²³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 40.1, ad 1, as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 121.

²⁴⁰ All this is intimately connected with the fundamental apostate dialectic that rules the roost in all “pagan” philosophy, as mentioned earlier!

²⁴¹ William Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 88, as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 121. See also, Muller, PRRD, IV, 184.

²⁴² See Long, PSTG, 51.

clear that they are more than “relations.”²⁴³ They share “personhood.”²⁴⁴ For this reason, it is not quite satisfactory either to speak about “three modes or forms of being in which the divine essence exists,”²⁴⁵ as has been done.²⁴⁶ The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are more than “three modes or forms” as well.²⁴⁷ After all, we don’t worship or petition abstract “modes” (or “relations” for that matter). Neither do we love “modes” or mirror them in our conduct. And, finally, the clincher, it would be more than just embarrassing to speak of our Lord Jesus as an “Incarnate Mode! Candidly, it is difficult not to “taste” the theo-ontology in all this, a theo-ontology that tries to “handle” what cannot be handled! Not ever! Upping the ante somewhat, it appears to “fight” surrender to the incomprehensible complementarity

²⁴³ Bavinck, RD, II, 303ff, esp. 306, 314ff. Susan Coakley, “Persons in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,” in Stephen T. Davis, *e. a.*, eds., *The Trinity*, 143, may well weigh in on this when she shows that in Gregory of Nyssa’s view of and interaction with the “spiritual complexity and richness” in the realm of the Trinity” we do not find “a reduction of ‘persons’ to ‘relationality.’” See also Frame, ST, 486, “To suggest that *relation* is somehow a better term, than *person* to designate the members of the Trinity is, I think, wrong. The persons are not “really” relations, rather than real persons. They are persons standing in relation.” Of course, to declare “relations” as the fundamental category to be “wrong” may not quite hit the nail on the head. If it is the peak of an underlying (submerged) philosophical iceberg, this simply must be identified and critiqued as well!

²⁴⁴ For a copiously annotated landmark study of the concept of “person” in reference to the Triune God from its emergence in the early Church up to the present, see Ury, TP, esp. 48, for its emergence. He argues persuasively that there is no better nomenclature to summarize the biblical teaching than both “Trinitarian” with reference to God, and “Person” with reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, with reference to John Calvin, *Institutes*, I, xiii, 3 (Ury, TP, 43). The term “person” is so “attractive” to him because in the *person* of “Christ the inner differentiations of the Godhead were revealed, and it was there that the wellspring of Trinitarian personhood began to flow forth” (Ury, TP, 64). For the “person” concept in “the Biblical tradition,” see Ury, TP, 86-91, and as “a Theological Category,” Ury, TP, 92-101, esp. 100. His conclusion is telling, “The continued use of personal terms indicates that the early trinitarians saw them as less abstract than other options which we define as ‘modes,’ or ‘subsistences,’ or ‘manners of subsisting.’” From this perspective it may well be argued that Reformed orthodoxy with its scholastic nomenclature of “modes” and “subsistences” and Neo-orthodoxy with its anti-scholastic (as well as anti-biblical) terminology of “manners of subsisting” in reference to Tri-personality of our God is not much of an improvement, to put it mildly!

²⁴⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1033), 75, as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 122.

²⁴⁶ Bavinck, RD, II, 303. See also Mastricht, TPT, II, 146, “(a) God’s essence does not differ from his personality except in our reason or conception, which can think of one thing only while it is not thinking of another thing. For God’s personality is nothing than the subsistence of his essence and his subsistence is nothing other than the actual existence of his substance, which without doubt does not differ from the God who himself exists. And (b) the persons in the abstract differ among themselves, not as three subsistences, but as three modes of one subsistence, which, because they are not beings, do not compose, but only distinguish and limit.”

²⁴⁷ As has been observed by Gerald O’Collins, SJ, “The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions,” in Stephen Davis, *e.a.* eds, *The Trinity*, 17-18, 22-23, “the proposals of Karl Barth (1886-1968) about the one God who subsists in three divine ‘modes of being’ (the Revealer, the Revelation and the Revealedness) and the reflections of Karl Rahner (1904-1984) on three distinct ‘manners of subsistence’” stand in need of serious investigation. After all, “how could we adore and glorify ‘modes’ and ‘manners?’” Or for that matter, how could we “pray” to them? He concludes that “personal language is the highest and best language that we have” with reference to Augustine, “the formula ‘three persons’ has been coined not in order to give a complete explanation by means of it, but in order that we might not be obliged to remain silent.” “There are no clearly superior substitutes” than “to speak of the ‘persons’ of the Holy Trinity,” recognizing, of course, that they are “not three distinctly and autonomous subjects.” That would turn Tri-personality into the error of Tritheism. In short, the noetic darkness of the incomprehensible essence of God remains in place. But the “person” language fits “perfectly” with the biblically revealed truth regarding the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For one, while it is not an exhaustive univocal language, in that it covers all bases -- how could it? --, it has a “literal” core that is undeniable. For another, while “the concept *person* should include all and only the content of the biblical teachings,” it is more than “simply a label for the ways in which Father, Son, and Spirit are alike, in distinction from the Godhead as a whole.” For this, see also Sarah Coakley, “‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity,” in Davis, TT, 139-140.

of truth, “tooth and nail!” As its corollary, it is difficult to see how we even could try to “feed” God’s people with all this. It flies in the face of the *Sola Scriptura* in its non-scholastic concreteness!

At any rate, there is clearly a bind here. The solution has been sought in speaking “alternatively of one God as Father-wise, Son-wise and Spirit-wise, and relation-wise,” or speaking of him in “a double manner, alternatively according to substance and relation (“substance-wise” and “relationship-wise”).”²⁴⁸ Both ways allegedly would satisfy “the simplicity of God that makes the Trinity such a profound mystery,” and “*forces* (italics, mine) us (as humans) to speak of the essence of God under the rubric of (both) substance terminology and relation terminology.”²⁴⁹ This is a virtual echo of an earlier writer, “Some who intend to avoid Sabellianism say the persons differ really, but that seems to tend toward tritheism. And again, others who intend to avoid tritheism state that the persons differ modally, as one mode from another. Not indeed by reason alone, but in reality, which they express with two words conjoined, by saying that they differ really-modally (*realiter-modaliter*), that is as one mode from another, not by reason only, but in reality. And this indeed satisfies me the most.”²⁵⁰

Owen seeks to “solve the bind” by putting it like this, “A person is nothing but the divine essence subsisting in an especial manner.”²⁵¹ This “solution” appears to transcend the bind and therefore may well (should?) have it over the earlier ones by starting with the word “person.” Or the simpler and therefore the even better “solution” in the face of the incomprehensibly impenetrable, “God is his own essence or nature, and the persons themselves are his nature.”²⁵² In both instances, we notice an equal emphasis (embrace!) of “divine *essence*” and “divine *persons*,” without any attempt to make their interrelationship intelligible to the human mind. With this as backdrop it is more than just interesting to note that our earlier author who holds that the difference of the persons in the Godhead can be “best” spelled out as “really-modally” (*realiter-modaliter*) makes a “magnanimous” gesture toward those who are not “pleased” with this formula and diverge from him. “Instead they judge that it must be said that the persons differ personally (*personaliter*, hk). But what this is to say except that the persons differ as persons, while nothing is said about how one person differs from another? And yet if someone cannot walk in these scholastic stilts (clunky and cumbersome boots!), let him say that he is taught from the Scriptures that the persons differ as three (1 John 5:7). But by what kind of distinction he does not know since Scripture does not disclose this, or that they differ supernaturally, not naturally.”²⁵³

²⁴⁸ See also Long, PSTG, 98. The inseparable combination of “substance-wise” and “relationship-wise” basically spells one God (essence) in three relations (paternity, filiation and spiration), that is, “simplicity-with-distinction.”

²⁴⁹ Dolezal, AG, 123. It seems to me that to locate the mystery of the Trinity in the simplicity of God which entails his Absoluteness as simplex in contrast to his complex creation lacks sufficient clarity. It is preferable to locate it in the *combination* of his Oneness (simplicity) and his Threeness (even if accommodated in his simplicity). In other words, in his *Trinitarian Tri-Personality*, which excludes both Tri-theism and Unitarianism. Furthermore, no one should ever feel *forced* to portray Scripture truth. The use of this term may well indicate a theo-ontological leaven that gropes its way to describe the indescribable.

²⁵⁰ Mastricht, TPT, II, 504.

²⁵¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust), II, 407, as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 122.

²⁵² Gilles Emery, as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 123.

²⁵³ Mastricht, II, TPT, 504. Mastricht clearly implies that he knows more than his brothers who at a given point plead “ignorance.” Well, if this is the correct point, it spells their refusal to enter the inner sanctum of the essence of God.

Frankly, I decidedly belong to the latter category. Just stick to Scripture! The clearest and most understandable way to convey the Biblical truth that is at stake is simply to state that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit differ *qua* “Persons,” that is, *personaliter*.²⁵⁴ Of course, with the further clarifying “distinction,” that is, with the further biblically “disclosed” addition, that the “relations,” embedded in the realities of paternity, filiation, and spiration, *do* shed (much!) light on the difference, in fact, all the sufficient (revealed) light that we need! So, this more than covers Mastricht’s “reservation.”²⁵⁵ In a word, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “persons-*in*-relations,” rather than “persons-*as*-relations.” At any rate, to focus just on “modes” (or on “mere relations”) has at least two strikes against it. It falls short of the biblical riches expressed (approximated?) in “persons.”²⁵⁶ It also

From this perspective it may well be that Mastricht wants to know too much. It is telling that his “solution” is the one that “pleases him most.” This is a subjective attitude that can hardly insist on a universal agreement. What pleases *me* most, however, is his description of scholasticism as proceeding in “clunky boots.” Maybe, seeking to enter God’s inner sanctum is tantamount to wearing “clunky boots,” and vice versa. Maybe, only such boots will give it a try.

²⁵⁴ This was also the view of Voetius, according to Muller, PRRD, III, 289, “He accepts the traditional assumption that the persons are identical *essentialiter* but distinct *personaliter* -- and that the relational distinction between the persons is a *distinctio realis*.”

²⁵⁵ This follows in the footsteps of Turretin, IET, I, 278, who argues that the three persons differ modally (*modaliter*) from each other. But his comments are noteworthy. “About the nature of the distinction theologians are not agreed. Some maintain that it is real; others formal; others virtual and eminent (of reasoned ratiocination which although it may not be on the part of the thing, still may have its foundation in the thing); others personal; others, finally modal. We think that these notions ought not to be troubled and cut to the quick, since being drawn from human and finite things, they can but very imperfectly adumbrate this mystery. It is better to be satisfied with this general notion that there is a distinction, although what and how great it is, cannot be comprehended and expressed by us.” So far, so good, if not very good and worth remembering whenever we deal with “mystery,” so as to abstain from prying in the “secret things” of God, and refuse to be dogmatic and judgmental (Deut. 29:29a). But it would have been “excellent,” if he had admonished his readers hotly to pursue the revealed mandates (Deut. 29:29b). The same humble, child-like “sanity” is found in Calvin’s statement (*Institutes*, I, xiii, 5). “Indeed, I could wish that (theological terms, such as Trinity, *homoousia*, etc.) were buried, provided that among all men this faith were agreed on: that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are one God, yet that the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are distinguished from each other by some peculiar property (or quality). I am not so rigidly precise as to do dogged battle (fight fiercely) over mere words.” Of course, he wholeheartedly embraces the terminology that the Church “by necessity” forged to confess the truth of Scripture, under the onslaught of intolerable heresies, to unmask false teachers. But he recognizes with Augustine “the poverty of human speech” to express “great matters!” This is already the case on the creaturely level. For instance, the word “love” is “poor” compared to its *living reality*. But this does not make it defective. *Qua* expression, it can be perfect and poor at the same time! “Mysterious” complementarity of truth once again! Turretin, IET, I, 258, quotes Calvin to this effect as well, but with him at the same time “insists” (in rather strong language) that the use of the Church’s terminology “is not only lawful, but also beneficial and necessary for repressing the pertinacity of heretics and for bringing them out of their lurking laces.”

²⁵⁶ The definition of “person” has proven to be a controversial issue. The term itself is a welcome legacy from the early Church. Candidly, it took quite some time to hammer out the best terminology to bring out both the one-ness and the three-ness in God. Eventually it settled on *ousia* and *hupostases* in the Greek East and on *essentia* and *personae* in the Latin West. Transferring this to the English language, God is both and simultaneously one in essence and three in persons. This is not to say that the definition of “person” is an easy matter. Dionysius wished to stay away from it because it is not a Biblically revealed designation (Long, PSTG, 110-111). Aquinas adopted Boethius’ definition, “an individual substance of a rational nature” (*naturae rationalis individua substantia*). But this *could* open the door to tri-theism. As we saw already, it is best simply to attribute to the three persons the properties that are reflected in what Scripture defines as “the image of God.” Since humans are theo-morph, there must be and is a “likeness,” be it a reflected and reflecting one. This is God’s point of departure in communicating with mankind, and therefore must be our point of departure in communicating with God without even *asking* the question how “the original” and “the reflection” relate. See also, Calvin, *Institutes*, I, xiii, 2-4; Turretin, IET, I, 253-255; IV, 167-169; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 278-303; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (P&R Publishing,

appears to have the hallmarks upon it of making the unintelligible to the human mind intelligible to the human mind, as possibly a Thomist left-over. This, of course, would come close to a kiss of death if Deuteronomy 29:29a is violated!

By way of conclusion, for one, Scripture does not (first) reveal “relations” that (subsequently) share “essence” and (consequently) are “persons” as well. It reveals “persons” who are increasingly revealed as sharing “essence” and sustaining “relations.” So, this is how we do and must confess the “mystery” of the Trinity, the mystery of the “*One Tri-Personal God*,” and leave it at that, without seeking “to probe what cannot be probed,” “to penetrate what cannot be penetrated,” or “to make mental sense” of it, to whatever extent.²⁵⁷ For another, to talk about “modes of subsistence” seems to do just that. Hence the preference to shy away from it! Unless one is sold on the incomprehensible complementarity of truth as a God-given reality there will always remain the tendency “to go a bridge too far.” The fact that the 1944 event in World War II, which is characterized as such, ended up with a calamity may well (should?) be a handwriting on the theo-ontological wall.²⁵⁸

In a word, Aquinas and his followers are problematic in, if not because of his philosophical (Aristotelian/Plotinian/Dionysian) inspired (all too) theo-ontological “micro-management that ignores the boundary line God forbids humans to cross.

Spotlight X

Persons-in-Relation vs. Persons-as-Relations

Not so incidentally, Aquinas’ “property (relation)-person” conundrum produced a sharp “response” by Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980). In it he questions Aquinas’ micro-management with its concentration on “relations” as “properties.” He rather bluntly states that “properties cannot be persons” ... “So, if God is a property, he isn’t a person.” Without necessarily taking Aquinas’ side, Eleonore Stump, “God’s Simplicity,” in OHA, 136-145, published an insightful rebuttal. But before I summarize this, here is the chain of events, as I see it. Aquinas clearly appears to identify properties (relations) as persons. “Personal properties are the same as the persons because the abstract and the concrete are the same in God; since they are the subsisting persons themselves as paternity is the Father Himself, and filiation is the Son, and procession is the Holy Ghost” (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 40.1; also quoted in Dolezal, AG, 121). Plantinga flat out rejects this identification, and with it dismisses simplicity. Dolezal, 123, retains

2004), 119-124, 230-237, 252-268, 458-464, 493; Frame, ST, 481-489; Muller, PRRD, IV, 25-27, 33-49, 53-58, 73-74, 133, 167-195, 249-251, 287-288, 343-344, 371-372, 376-378.

²⁵⁷ For an excellent (near-exhaustive?) survey of all the “ins” and “outs” of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity as discussed throughout the Centuries, as well as his serious question mark behind Aquinas’ defining “relations” (properties) as “persons,” and the (at least partially philosophical) backdrop of this proposition in his doctrine of simplicity, see Frame, ST, 421-513, esp., 428-431, 481-487. See also, Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), esp. 121-153; and even more so, Ury, TP, 221, who criticizes both Boethius and Aquinas for “finding the plurality of the Trinity not in persons but in relations.”

²⁵⁸ I recommend the reading of Ury, TP, 215-224, esp. 221, on Aquinas. He underscores that in his discussion of the Trinity Aquinas starts out by describing the “Tri” in Trinity, first of all, as “subsistent relations,” that is, as paternity, filiation and spiration. When he subsequently earmarks the three “relations” as persons, he “constantly avoids any individuation that would slight the absolute unity of the Godhead.” It is rather clear that he tilts toward universality in his apparent wish to accommodate Aristotle’s type of simplicity. Scripture, in its avowal of the complementarity of truth, equally emphasizes the Oneness and the Threeness! Aquinas’ “tilt” betrays a “tinkering” to make the impenetrable as intelligible as possible. It is this theo-ontological *faux-pas* that must be exposed and rejected!

simplicity but twitches Aquinas some, whether consciously or not. It appears that he neither rejects nor endorses this “identity.” He writes, “In God there is no mixture of abstract and concrete” and adds, “we are forced (!) to speak of God’s essence under the rubric of substance terminology and relation terminology, which Augustine calls ‘substance-wise and relationship-wise.’” This comports to the latter’s “uniform multiformity and multiform uniformity.” In short, Aquinas moves beyond Augustine, while Dolezal returns to Augustine. Stump weighs in on this and interprets Aquinas in a way that leaves Plantinga, Dolezal as well as Aquinas himself behind. She is the only one I know of who *essentially*, and *properly* so, appeals to the complementarity of truth, without, however, mentioning this explicitly in so many words, or doing so in a biblically complete, if not exhaustive manner. She recognizes that Aquinas argues for the metaphysical differentiation between *quid est* (“what is”) or *esse* (essence) and *id quod est* (“that which is”) or an apparent entity (existence), that is, between an abstract universal and concrete particulars, such as, between “running” and “runner,” or “whiteness” and “white items.” However, still according to Stump, for Aquinas “God is *esse*, as the doctrine of simplicity makes clear. But this *esse* is also--somehow--an *id quod est*.” To me, this is not strong enough. For Aquinas God is *esse* and *simultaneously* an *id quod est*, that is, “how-ever” this is the case, and not just “somehow.” That is, God is both and at the same time a “substance” and a “person.” So, also Long, PSTG, 98, “Substance (*esse*) and (inter-personal) relation have been equated.” (more about this “equated” below). At this point, however, Stump’s analysis appears to display a better, if not admirable grasp of the situation that faces everybody who holds to the doctrine of the “Tri-une” God. She takes her point of departure in Aquinas’ own statement, “Because God is both simple (*esse*) and (italics, mine) subsistent (*existent*), we attribute to God both abstract names – to signify God’s simplicity (*esse*) – and concrete names – to signify God’s completeness and concreteness (*existence*).” From here she turns to quantum physics to define *the lay of the land!* Just like (physical) “light” is “uniformly multiform,” so is (spiritual) simplicity. Physically, the “one” light is simultaneously both a uniform wave and a multiform series of particles. Wave and particles are innerly contradictory but still live a reconciled existence. Since “we do not comprehend God’s *quid est* (*esse*), we are limited to (talk in terms) of quantum physics.” According to Aquinas, “God himself is neither universal nor particular” (ST, I, 13 a. 9). He essentially seems to equate the two. The universal *is* the particular! Stump says, “no, they remain distinct.” In fact, they are contradictory to the human mind. But they are also harmonious, coining it in a refreshing way as “quantum metaphysics.” This spells mystery and is a reality we simply will have to live with. This comports with Augustine who warns not to say too much or too little about the Triune God (Long, PSTG, 82). At any rate, this is, for all practical purposes, what complementarity of truth is all about. Hence, so far, so good, if not excellent! But still Stump misses its zenith. What in this context is paradoxically contradictory to the human mind finds a harmonious resting place in the regenerate heart! So, proclaim this *evangelistically* and do this *vigorously*. To put all this very graphically, Aquinas resides in a *well-defined land*. He equates Property (universal) with Personhood (particular). Plantinga holds that Aquinas lives in “*la-la*” land. Property (universal) and Personhood (particular) are mutually exclusive. It appears that in some sense Dolezal is admittedly (?) “wavering” in “*no man’s*” land. It seems that the best he can do is (by default?) to “talk *alternately* “substance-wise (property, universal) and relationship-wise (personhood, particular).” Stump describes *the lay of the land*. Apply the principle of quantum physics. Property (*esse*, universal) and personhood (existence, particular) are both one *and* distinct, reflecting the teaching of Scripture that God is both “love” (universal/property) and “loving” (particular/personal). She argues that this is what Aquinas really sets forth. I, frankly, doubt this. If this were the case, neither Plantinga nor Dolezal would have come to their respective conclusions. But be this as it may, Scripture invites us to enter *the promised land*. In the TRI-UNE God the incomprehensible complementarity of truth of both universality (Tri-UNE) and particularity (TRI-une) come into their own! They may be unexplainably contradictory to the finite human mind. But they find a mental, volitional, and emotive resting place in the regenerate heart. This is the *landscape* that can only be *seen* (Deut. 29:2-4; John 3:3) in all its mysterious glory by *the regenerate heart*, which is *promised* by the Father (Ezek. 36:26), *produced* by the Son (1 Pet. 1:3), and *implanted* by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). Anyone who starts his theology with a regenerate vision of this *biblical landscape* does not need the endless type of theo-ontologizing that appears to lose itself in opacities which are too often difficult to decipher, if not seem to tie itself in knots, and leave a littered landscape in its wake.

Incidentally, Eleonore Stump, “bless her soul in great appreciation,” finds it hard to resist the temptation to apply the principle of quantum physics also to the attributes of God by returning to the light phenomenon. Just like “light” provides a paradigm to situate the relationship of property and personhood, honoring simplicity, that is, essential unity with concrete distinctions (not parts!), so it shows a way to situate Divine attributes. Newton discovered that “white light contained within it all the richness of the other colors of light,” once again, essential unity with distinctions (not parts!). This could suggest that just as there is no absolute

identity of the three persons in the Godhead, so there is no such identity of Divine attributes. Both spell essential unity in distinction, tri-personal (in the case of the three persons in the Godhead) and multi-attributal (in the case of their perfections). In both instances the relationship between essential unity and distinction (diversity), that is, the relationship between “real distinctions and their essence to which they add nothing real” (Bavinck, RD, II, 177), are incomprehensible. But more about this, which may well be a “landmark” analysis, later!

To conclude this Spotlight, Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in Oliver D. Crisp, ed., *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2009) appears to present a sequel to Alvin Plantinga’s thesis. While Aquinas tilts toward the “relationship” pole and fits in “personhood” later, Cornelius Plantinga starts with “personhood” and ends up with the Trinity as a “social unit.” This is theo-ontological micro-management as well. I wish that both would have said something like this, “We do not know what we do not know. But what we do know, based upon God’s authoritative Word, is the truth that God is Tri-Personal, One God in Three Persons, Triune! We stick to the latter univocation and refuse to go beyond this in arrogant speculation. Finally, following this we devote ourselves (“solely”) to listening to what he (“simply”) *tells us to do*.” Hence our hot pursuit of Christ’s Triple Command. This would be a breath of fresh air, if not a mighty Holy Spirit Wind in the Sails of the Church which would invigorate and galvanize it to pursue the “ethics” that God requires. See also the statement of Catherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), I, 247 (as quoted in Long, PSTG, 375), “Not yet have we scaled the heights of Trinity, the dogma of Divine Mystery as Tri-personal, but we are never outside this Mystery, even or especially in the Divine Unity.” My only comment, “Don’t even *try* to scale it, unless you want to resemble a Mt. Everest climber who seeks to accomplish his mission without a non-existing oxygen tank strapped on his back. Of course, you will never make it. Instead, lodge this Mystery in your heart, stop wasting your time and energy, and go all out for the untiring, endless, and fruitful enterprise of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them obedience! Lamentably, this Deut. 29:29 counsel is (loudly) conspicuous in its absence in (virtually) all theological treatises. Hence the need to repeat it, until it sinks in!

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If the charge of (unacceptable) theo-ontological micro-management is correct, Aquinas’ root error may well be glaringly clear. He does not take his starting point in the complementarity of truth that cannot be explained by the human mind and (therefore?) does not evangelistically insist on and call for a heart transplant in regeneration to have the incomprehensible Trinity situated in its only possible and available cognitive, volitional and emotive resting place. Instead, with the assistance of philosophical reason he turns to the type “simplicity” which he (supposedly) finds “ready-made” in both Augustine and Dionysius, but does not derive, to start with, from explicit Scripture. This concept, then, allegedly “serves the *surprising* purpose of *making sense* (emphases, mine) of divine processions” as well as the “divine Trinity.”²⁵⁹ The root error, of course, would be his avowed aim to *make*

²⁵⁹ So, Long, PSTG, 22-23. Long, PSTG, 91, argues that for theologians from Augustine and onward “Divine simplicity, recognized by many (apostate) philosophers, renders intelligible the revealed teaching of the Trinity, a teaching no philosopher *qua* philosopher recognized. The perfectly simple God bound them together in a common venture even when the specifics of the language and presentation of God differed.” Apparently, according to Long, PSTG, 92-103, when Aquinas launches his treatment of simplicity, he builds his case on the foundation of Augustine (and Dionysius) and not on any philosopher because Augustine does not only posit the “naked” philosophical “that” but also the Trinitarian “how.” However, where Augustine got his “concept” is not (made) clear. Doubtlessly the “Nicene Creedal Christianity of ‘Light from Light’ and ‘true God from true God’” contributed to its emergence. But philosophical sources may have played a role as well. The same applies to Aquinas’ dependence upon Dionysius. Nicea may have influenced Aquinas theologically. But philosophically Proclus as well, if not more so, and also the “resituated Neo-Platonist triad of abiding, procession and return,” with a reference to Rom. 11:36 (See for this triad also, Emilsson, AA, 371, 380-381). His thinking reverberated in Aquinas, even if the latter’s “general epistemology finds as much, if not more, support in Aristotle than in Dionysius.” In short, the origin of Aquinas’ concept of simplicity is somewhat murky. But one thing appears to be clear. It did not just originate in a “Systematic Theology”

sense of the Tri-une God. In this he would go a bridge too far in his theo-ontological and by necessity all too complicated content-scholasticism.²⁶⁰ I am afraid that the bottom line is this.

that was based exclusively upon biblical data. (Apostate) philosophy may well have contributed (given rise?) to it as well. This raises the question (1) whether the philosophical input was sufficiently “sanitized” to play a proper role in a biblically orchestrated theology, and (2) if so, how simplicity should be biblically defined and defended. Long, PSTG, 104-115, accentuates this (conundrum?) when he argues that Aquinas, when he (finally?) turns to Scripture, avails himself of Dionysius (!) “to provide him a way to read Scripture ... as a ‘sacred veil’ through which one ascends to God’s simplicity,” and eventually to God’s perfection. Incidentally, “the correlation between simplicity and perfection sets forth God as a perfection that is so intense that nothing can be added or taken away from God.” In short, perfection stamps Divine simplicity as absolute and has it come into its full-orbed, luminous, and incontestable own! Not so incidentally, the (apostate) philosophical thesis that Scripture is (only) a “veil” cannot but stand in contrast to the (biblical) theological inipit that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God. This similar, if not identical to Karl Barh’s claim that Scripture is only a “witness” to God’s self-revelation. “God forbid” (ironically meant) to equate Scripture with God’s self-revelation (even on an accommodating level)! At any rate, this undergirds the diagnosis, mentioned beow, that there is a “growing tension” between theological truth and dialectic scholastic reasoning. An inerrant Scripture and Scripture as merely a “veil” that essentially hides its Subject, matter and all, are not in the same ballpark. They cannot be!

²⁶⁰ Bavinck, RD, I, 126, 146-148, argues that the early Church (Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen) sought to *raise* “faith” (*pistis*) to the level of “knowledge” (*gnosis*), not just as a means “to fight against heresy,” but as a goal by itself with the aid of the “whole of Greek philosophy.” This spilled over in Anselm who initiated the long period of scholasticism. “He still operated in the naive confidence that faith could be elevated to the level of knowledge.” Over the objection of many who “pointed out the (frightening) dangers of philosophy” eventually “the scholastic method was established once and for all,” with the “Aristotelian (type of) philosophy (rather than the Platonic one), though modified here and there, considered to provide the best defense of the church’s doctrine.” Thus, “scholasticism as the attempt, with the help of philosophy to gain scientific knowledge of revealed truth” gained the day and reached its peak in Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. However, due to the opposition of Duns Scotus and the nominalism of William of Ockham, it declined and saw “its form become more rigid ... its method more sophisticated ... and its systematic theology degenerate in endless argumentation.” It may well be that a failure (refusal) to build one’s theology exclusively on the foundation of the *Sola Scriptura*, combined with the decision to enlist philosophy and tradition, makes this “deterioration” inevitable. Bavinck, RD, I, 178, further records that “Calvin banishes all philosophical and humanistic ideas and adheres as rigorously as possible to Scripture.” As we saw, only this can (1) pave the way to a 20/20 vision of the glorious complementarity of truth that overcomes the contrastive view of transcendence and immanence and its resulting self-immobilizing and destructive quagmire, and (2) open up not only a vista upon the fullness of God, but also the reality of being filled with this fullness (Eph. 3:19). I hope and pray that is now crystal clear that this goes against the deepest grain of the theo-ontological enterprise, inclusive of the one practiced by Medieval scholasticism as it is hoodwinked by the “empty deceit” of any philosophy that posits the “One” as Point of Origin and Point of Destiny for everybody and everything. This includes Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Plotinian Neoplatonism! At any rate, could Calvin’s radically-principial and totally-practical commitment to Scripture as the sole *principium cognoscendi* be at least one reason why the writings of the Reformed post-Reformation theologians, who followed in the footsteps of Medieval scholasticism, have virtually disappeared from the Church’s line of vision, while Calvin’s *Institutes* and Commentaries remain as fresh as ever? To spin on some more, even if their truth value were beyond dispute, if not admirable, would (in general) bringing these scholastic writings back “as is” really undo the damage that it somehow was not able to prevent? At the least, should it not be meticulously and purposefully researched why Enlightenment Rationalism and its consequent Liberalism followed historically in their wake, even if these were not their legitimate offspring, as Muller in his four content-packed volumes (PRRD, I, II, III, IV) continuously and persuasively argues? Could there be “something” or “some things” missing in them, biblically, theologically, apologetically, or otherwise, both in terms of commission and omission, the identification (or exposure) of which could function as a type of “handwriting” on the walls of today’s Church so as to change its course, or to assume a more excellent course to see the present spiritual ebttide turn (once again) into a Spiritual (Holy Spirit) Floodtide? Nonchalantly (irritably or otherwise) to wave off such “research” may well be unconscionable in the light (read: darkness) of an “age” in which the forces of evil by common consent are in the ascendancy across the board. Utterly necessary gratitude for the many and at times “awesome” blessings that come our way, and the equally necessary and joyful praise of our benevolent God for them, should never serve to close our eyes for the onslaught of

Aquinas seeks to serve two masters. Theologically he is committed to the Scriptures *and* the prevailing ecclesiastical tradition. No possible doubt about this. Hence, he confesses *con amore* the classic Doctrine of the Trinity. “One God and Three Persons.” In this context he wholeheartedly designates the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as persons. The opening statement of his magnum opus, the *Summa Theologiae*, makes this crystal clear.²⁶¹ So, no contest on this score! But when he takes the philosophical route, seeking to make the classic doctrine intelligible by putting it in intellectual concrete, he takes a different tack. For one, the Tri-personality of God is an exclusively revealed doctrine and fully out of the range of the intellect. For another, as mentioned earlier, he would not wish to “offend” Aristotle whose “godhead” is both impersonal and one (simple). So, he settles for a godhead who is one (simple), but with distinction (tri-relational) as the best, in fact, the only thing he can come up with by means of the intellect. When he subsequently designates the relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration as “persons,” he simply pastes a theological verity on a philosophical outcome. It is a well-known and admitted fact that he uses this same approach when he presents his “Five Ways” to arrive at the existence of God. Especially in “The First Way,” he virtually duplicates Aristotle’s argument to end up with an “Unmoved Mover.” Subsequently, he simply concludes, “This is God.”²⁶² Basically, both a non-sequitur and a sleight of hand! The conclusion is far from a logical requirement, and the Biblical Trinitarian, Tri-Personal God is in no way an Aristotelian, monadic, impersonal Principle.

In the light of all this it would be hard to deny that we encounter here a type of *theo-ontology*, if not *onto-theology*, that seeks somehow to get a rational handle on the “secret” essence of God.

Wherever Reformed orthodoxy settles on a so-called “tri-modal subsistence” to make the Triune God intelligible of sorts, it basically drinks from the same well and ends up in the same ballpark. At any rate, that the present critical assessment of Aquinas’ likely train of thought does *not* and is *not* meant to undermine the *biblical* doctrine of the simplicity of God should become clear below.

After this rather lengthy analysis and assessment of Aquinas’ philosophy-inspired treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, let us turn to the *third* line of argument. This covers the next area of expressed concern and raises several pertinent questions, some of which are posed by an analytic philosopher.

First, how does Aquinas’ idea of simplicity, which entails the identity of all God’s perfections, explain his knowledge of the multiple particulars in his creation? If all his perfections are one, this includes his omniscience. So, if his omniscience is no part and has no parts, all known particulars turn into one as well. In fact, they must *be* one. After all, what

darkness, and ease us out of the thick of the ever-on-going prescribed battle of life and death (Gen. 3:16), let alone turn us AWOL (Rev. 3:1, 16)! Oh, the glory of and the need for complementarity of truth, to guide us also in this context!

²⁶¹ See for this also, Long, PSTG, xix. “God is simple, perfect, immutable, impassible, infinite, eternal and one, who is revealed in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s essence is one, yet each person is the essence. The Father is the essence. The Son is the essence, and the Spirit is the essence. The Father, Son and Spirit are also the essence. Nonetheless, there is only one essence and three persons. The persons are distinguished by their relations.” Comments, Long, “Aquinas did not invent this answer. He developed it from authorities, especially Holy Scripture, etc.”

²⁶² Aquinas, ST, I, 2.3. Whether he argues for (1) a “First Mover,” (2) a “First Cause,” (3) a “Necessary Being,” (4) a “Maximum Good,” or (5) an “Ultimate Governance,” the end refrain is essentially the same, (1) Everyone understands it (him) to be God, (2) Everyone gives it (him) the name God, (3) Everyone speaks of it (him) as God, (4) This (it) we call God, and (5) This being (it) we call God; see also, Long, PSTG, 14, 70-71, 79, 181.

may be, in fact, is clearly divided and multiplied in human cognition and remains simple and unified in God. The pagan onto-theology of the necessary ultimate of the entirely perfect and immutable “unconditioned condition” cannot come to any other conclusion. It has no other choice. Neither, for that matter, has any theo-ontology that follows in its footsteps. In the simple and perfect essence of God (prior to the temporally fractured display of the rainbow of his perfections), “not only is God’s *knowing* single, but also *what God knows* is (must be?) single,” by good and necessary consequence, if not by definition.²⁶³ It is doubtful that Aquinas would agree with this. But is it an avoidable conclusion on his premises? Even if the jury would still be out, this also has been found wanting.

Second, how does his concept of simplicity, which holds that “primarily and essentially God only knows (and wills) himself,” tolerate and justify for God to know (and will) “other things than himself?” Here “a chain of being” (*analogia entis*) is asked to do yeoman’s service.²⁶⁴ “God’s essence cannot be increased or multiplied in itself.” But it supposedly “can be multiplied according to its *likeness* (italics, mine), which is participated by many,” in fact, by “a whole array of beings, which each in its own way and degree *resembles* (italics, mine) God’s being,” and as such “is known and willed by him as a sort of *enhancement* (italics, mine) of God’s own self.” “God knows and wills things not by receiving anything from them, but rather causing his *causality* (emphasis, mine) on them.” In this way “his essence *contains* the *similitude* (italics, mine) of things other than himself.” “If the principal object of the divine knowledge and will would be other than the divine essence, it would follow that there is something higher than the divine knowledge will *moving* (emphasis, mine) it.” And this would subtract from the unconditioned God!

Apart from the fact that Aquinas’ “*chain of being*” appears to jar with the radical Biblical Creator/Being-creation/being *distinction*, there is every reason to recognize in all this, via Plotinus and Dionysius, the shadow of Aristotle’s epistemology and metaphysics. He holds that “an effect is adequately known when its cause is known” (epistemology). He also assigns “immovability,” to his “godhead.” But what may be even more damaging, in what way do other things *resemble* God in their being? (A matter of Dionysian emanation?) Of course, “they cannot be identical to God’s essence.” They are and remain “other things.” Still, they cannot be separated from it either. Plotinian simplicity does not allow this. Frankly, the question is unanswerable. The plot even thickens when the consideration of “evil” enters the picture as “one of the other things.” It apparently *resembles* God’s essence as the shadow side of the good. The quagmire is inescapable. So, all this “theo-ontology” has been found wanting as well.²⁶⁵

Third, a further question may arise how Aquinas would handle “the hate of God.” The simplicity of God does not allow for his literal anger, an anthropomorphism or for his literal grief, an anthropopathism. But how about his hate? Also, an anthropomorphism? Or, if it is an enduring property, is it eternal? Very few theologians have been willing to draw this

²⁶³ So, Wolterstorff, IG, 214.

²⁶⁴ See, Wolterstorff, IG, 213.

²⁶⁵ See for all this, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), I, 108-109, 208-215.

conclusion.²⁶⁶ And if it is eternal, is it synonymous with his love? According to some it is.²⁶⁷ This also enters biblically uncharted territory and so appears to be more than a stretch.

Fourth, Aquinas' treatment of predestination has met with near-universal opposition. He construes both election and reprobation as parts of an apparent "hierarchy of multiplicity," which is an outflow of God's goodness. Since the simplicity of this goodness cannot be conveyed to complex creatures, it necessarily diversifies in election through Divine mercy and reprobation through Divine justice. However, the latter comes with the further understanding that it is not the object of God's antecedent will, which targets the salvation of all humans, but of his consequent will resulting from their resistance. The "hierarchy of multiplicity has been called "odd," damnation as a participation in God's goodness "vulgar," and the construction of two wills "questionable."²⁶⁸

With all this, the charge of an ever-increasing and ever more erudite theo-ontological micro-management of the *essence* of God becomes increasingly credible.²⁶⁹

To summarize, Aquinas fully embraces the biblical and ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, of God's omniscience, and of his knowledge of things other than himself. This is his starting point, revealed in Scripture, settled by Tradition, and embraced as such. No question! But he has inescapable trouble in *establishing rationally*, that is apologetically, the relationship of Divine simplicity with Divine Tri-personality, with Divine *omni*-science, with Divine knowledge of *other things*, especially evil, with attributes, such as God's *hate*, and with God's will regarding *reprobation*. In each of these five areas there is something jarring. It looks at times that he tries to fit a square peg into a round hole. To be sure, not (necessarily) in Aquinas' biblical (and ecclesiastical) faith, but (definitely) in his (apologetic) efforts *to make it intelligible*, as far as it goes, both by and to the human mind. It appears that he, indeed, goes "one or more bridges too far." What if he had embraced the biblical and incomprehensible complementary truth, revealed in Scripture, as his heartfelt and gladly acknowledged "base camp" as well as his indisputable and inviolable "starting point," rather than as a destination to rationally to reach and a goal rationally to strive for, his theological enterprise as well as that of his fellow scholastics would have been qualitatively different. Rather than at forbidden and utterly incomprehensible "essence," it would have aimed at the mandated and utterly comprehensible "ethics" in the broadest sense of the word that finds its culmination point in the Grand Command of their Commander-in-Chief, which is, to make disciples by means of the definitive New Covenantal Gospel of regeneration, justification, and sanctification, to baptize them in the name of the Triune God, and to teach

²⁶⁶ See for this, Douma, *Common Grace*, 330-333. Arguably, God has an eternal hatred of sin. Scripture also testifies that God hates existing sinners (Ps. 7:11b; 11:5), even at time his own "beloved" people (Jer. 12:7-8). But we should be hard put to declare this latter "hatred" eternal, especially in the absence of any Scripture to this effect. The *only* part of wisdom is to take child-like rescue in the incomprehensible complementarity of truth, and simply abide by the truth of God's Word and not add anything to it that is impermissible and so inadmissible. So, let us not (literally) "break" our brain on how this stacks up with timeless Divine eternity, but instead use our time and energy to evangelize, etc. Bottom line? Do have a tearful burden for souls and pursue the making of disciples out of the wicked for them to escape the fearful hate and burning wrath of God!

²⁶⁷ According to George Swinnock, "God's attributes are one indivisible essence, to will and to understand, and to love and to hate, and to be, are all the same and one in God," as quoted in Dolezal, AG, 42. More about this below.

²⁶⁸ See, Long, PSTG, 37-39. Incidentally, the later concept of the so-called Middle Knowledge (Molina) sought to solve the antecedent/consequent will conundrum, with little success. When facing incomprehensibility, no proposed "solution" never is or never will be successful, even all appearances to the contrary!

²⁶⁹ Apparently, Aquinas did not address this issue. But Post-Reformation scholastics did. See for this Long, PSTG, 149.

them to observe what he commands in the progressive New Covenantal Gospel of daily repentance and faith, daily forgiveness and daily holiness. Who knows, whether this would have preempted Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. Whatever its merits may have been or continue to be, that content-scholasticism “missed the boat” in too many ways should never be forgotten, overlooked, ignored, or denied.

Let me seek to explain this some more. It appears to be an age-old question whether Aquinas is a theologian or a philosopher first.²⁷⁰ The best response has been that his theology and his philosophy are intertwined.²⁷¹ There is no doubt that he claims to be a *theologico-philosopher* first and foremost.²⁷² After all, his point of departure is God’s revelation in Scripture as confessed by the Church and explained in its tradition.

However, when he *philosophically* identifies the content of Scripture, especially as it pertains to the essence of God, it is remarkable how much it resembles the corresponding philosophies of his day. His overarching ontological thesis and his epistemic point of departure is that this essence is unknown and unknowable fully in the footsteps of Ancient philosophers. Essential namelessness is the name of the philosophical game. Then he reads the simplicity that he espouses, which is reportedly identical to what he finds in them, into Scripture, especially in Exodus 3:14. Following this he seeks to make all this as intelligible as possible by exploring the unknown and unknowable from the bottom up with philosophical considerations as his handmaiden. Here the plot thickens. Of course, he never can or does arrive at the summit. The theological language that he uses is only “analogical” and never univocal,²⁷³ and his philosophical considerations are always “error-full.”²⁷⁴ In other words, he is stuck on his way up.

Further, *theologically* he is fully aware and confesses from the heart “with the Church of all ages” that God is both one in “substance” (simplicity) and three in “persons”

²⁷⁰ See Long, PSTG, 6-9. See also Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP, 262.

²⁷¹ See Long, PSTG, 6-9, 40, 42, 52, 64-65, 68, 81-88, 112-113, 124-128, 150, 153-154, 327, 343. See also Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP, 243.

²⁷² See Long, PSTG, xix, 7, 8, 11, 12.

²⁷³ Scripture in its metaphorical language garment allegedly presents us with a set of “sacred veils” ... “through which one (supposedly) ascends (!) to the simplicity of God.” But these “veils” are in all reality impenetrable. They are not see-through veils. All “language nearly (?) fails us here.” After all, “We are clearer on what we cannot say than on what we can.” To be sure, Scripture presents us with “affirmative” language so that we can be assured of God’s subsistence (names, such as JHWH), rationality (mind), attributes (wisdom, etc.). But the way of “negation” trumps this, and is “more appropriate” (invisible, infinite, ungraspable). Augustine uses Biblical language to keep Plotinian Neoplatonism at bay. Dionysius resorts to Plotinus to undercut, if not invalidate Biblical language, with, of all things, quotations from Scripture. Augustine, to formulate it graphically, at times hangs on the complementarity of truth by his ultimately victorious (!) fingernails. Dionysius tragically destroys this complementarity and to a large extent (in the main?) foists this upon Aquinas, who ends up as an eager victim. After all, for both Dionysius and Aquinas univocity is deliberately out! They cannot transcend their own shadow either by the multitude of their words, including the copious use of legitimate Biblical terminology, or by the graphic nature of illustrations to illustrate the non-illustrationable, such as the light of the sun, both unknowable in its simple origin and (only) known analogically (and therefore non-informatively) in its rays, or by the sheer genius of their elaborate and erudite system formation, or by a combination of all the above. One must really get into their skin to grasp their tragic heroism or their heroic tragedy. See for this also, Long, PSTG, 102-108, esp. 105, 108. By way of a final question, why would the tragically heroic and heroically tragic fate that *by common consent* befell Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus in Ancient Philosophy and Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger in Modern Philosophy not equally befall any theological enterprise that piggybacks on them? The proof of the pudding in this context is not in the tasting, but in the undeniably deleterious outcome of the eating!

²⁷⁴ See once again, Long, PSTG, 7.

(distinction).”²⁷⁵ But when he *philosophically* hones in on simplicity-with-distinction, he cannot get much farther than identify the distinction in terms of *relations*.²⁷⁶ Aristotelian/Plotinian philosophy could possibly (barely?) live with “relations,” but definitely not with “persons.”²⁷⁷ In all this we encounter two Achilles’ heels. First, he runs smack in to the incomprehensible complementarity of truth, without recognizing this as such. “One God in Three Persons” “simply” cannot be made intelligible by or to the human mind, whether theologically or philosophically. Even if he puts in an effort, somehow Aquinas must have clearly recognized this when he talks about theological language as “analogical” only, and at the same time must have deep-down sensed it when he describes philosophical language as necessarily “full of errors,” without ever specifying (be able to specify?) the nature or type of these “errors.” Second, in a typical philosophical manner he starts out by declaring that God *is* a mystery, in fact, *is* a “secret.”²⁷⁸ Period! At the end due to his fundamental *theologia negativa* the essentially unknowable God is only “analogically” “known” and “knowable.”²⁷⁹ Allegedly “halfway (?)” but “irretrievably” error-full!²⁸⁰

On the other hand, the Reformers, in a typical *Sola Scriptura* manner, start out by declaring that God is eminently known and knowable. After all, he reveals himself. But there is a limit. He reserves the mystery of complementary truths as well as other “secrets” for himself and forbids us to “pry” into the, or to have God account for them, and to display n all this a Pauline and childlike spirit (Rom. 9:20). The difference is palpable! Officially, Aquinas is *theologico-philosophical*. But when push comes to shove, he is *philosophico-*

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²⁷⁵ See also Long, PSTG, xix, 21-22.

²⁷⁶ Aquinas, ST, I, 30.1; Long, PSTG, 51, 53.

²⁷⁷ It is more than interesting to note that Dionysius who admittedly helped pave the way for Aquinas to write out his Trinitarian doctrine in his *Summa Theologiae*, simplicity and all, refuses to use the term “person” as applicable to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, advisedly because it is not “expressed to us in sacred Scripture” (Long, PSTG, 110). But a second, if not the real reason may well be that the Aristotelian/Neoplatonist/Plotinian “simplicity” does not tolerate this! We know that philosophically Aquinas essentially followed suit with his emphasis upon “subsistent relations” as the transcendental condition of God’s *Tri-nitarian* being. If it had not been for the ecclesiastical tradition that had put the “person” concept in near-concrete, possibly (or thus) overcoming the alleged lack of perspicuity of Scripture, who knows whether this concept would have survived in Aquinas philosophical theologizing.

²⁷⁸ So also, virtually, Long, PSTG, 114.

²⁷⁹ The “negation” or “remotion” process eliminates what is “unfitting to God in creaturely existence such as composition.” But the double fact (1) that “God is known from creatures” and (2) that it is “known what must be removed from creatures, assumes some positive knowledge of God.” So Long, PSTG, 27, 31. Be this what it may, the “analogy” concept puts a question mark behind the nature of this measure of positive knowledge. Even if “simplicity” is part of it, which it undoubtedly must, we may well wonder what would happen with it, if the “analogy” concept would be applied to it. It should, since all creaturely concepts, whether simplicity, perfection, unity, infinity, immutability, eternity, etc., are denied “univocity” (Aquinas, ST, I, 27, 1; Long, PSTG, 31, 46, 50). Even “analogy?” In the light of the so-called “delicate balance” (Long, PSTG, 31), to conclude to a “half-way” knowledge may be a misnomer, and at the least too generous. “God exceeds our creaturely limited knowledge. In fact, “He overwhelms our cognition, rendering the knowledge of God nearly impossible.” However, “since God is the end of creaturely existence God must be able to be known” (wishful thinking?). Even “the natural human desire to know the cause when perceiving an effect” points to this. Incidentally, “effects” makes one “wonder, which must be satisfied.” Hence the philosophical enterprise (Aquinas, ST, I, 12.1; Long, PSTG, 33)! For the intertwinement of simplicity and analogy, see also Long, PSTG, 159-160. At any rate, in the case of Aquinas it seems that the plot increasingly thickens! Frankly, what a joy it is to embrace the incomprehensible nature of the complementarity of truth in a child-like manner, and to take this as the very perfectly positioned “basecamp” to focus upon Divine “ethics!”

²⁸⁰ Long, PSTG, 26.

theological.²⁸¹ Hence his “frustration (?)” present in the frequent reference to the unavoidable presence of “many errors,” whether he himself (1) properly recognized it as such and understood the possible reason for it, or (2) glossed over it with his concept of “analogy” and deemed it overcome, if not solved. The Reformation initiated a veritable paradigm shift when they committed themselves to the principle of *Sola Scriptura* and replaced the abstract Thomist philosophico-content-scholasticism with concrete *biblico-theology*.

At any rate, that Aquinas (and his unsuspecting followers) do and must hit jarring roadblocks should not come as a surprise. Any time folks try to intelligibly synthesize the two poles of incomprehensible complementary truth, such as the Uncreated One and Many in the Triune God, it cannot but fail, however much they tinker. As we already saw, the history of apostate philosophy is one huge attempt or an ever-ongoing series of attempts to synthesize universality (the one) and particularity (the many) without ever being successful. To put oneself in that “pipeline” with really “no light at that end of the tunnel,” must be to court disaster. At bottom, to hook up with this “vain deceit” (Paul) must go down as “foolish.” It is more than interesting to note that at the end of his life Aquinas commented on his contributions as follows, “All that I have written seems like straw to me.” With this he essentially characterized these contributions to be as seemingly (after all is said and done?) without substance, that is “empty.”²⁸² It may well be that he in a tragic but clairvoyant

²⁸¹ He is at least this as well, according to Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in RHMP, 242, 262. See also Christopher Upham, “The Influence of Thomas Aquinas,” in OHA, 525, “Certainly much of what is philosophical in the work of Aquinas derives from pagan or at least non-Christian thinking.” To the extent that (any borrowed) “truths” “can be known by reasoning without appeals to the supernatural (certainly a plausible reading of ST I q.1 a.5 ad 2), then presumably truths attainable in such pursuit would be essentially common to all humans.” This, of course, would be *philosophico-theological* with a vengeance. See for this also, J. van der Hoeven, “Kierkegaard en Marx als Dialectische Critici van Hegel,” in *Philosophia Reformata* (Vol. 34, 1969), 89, “There is a growing tension to be established between (Aquinas’) ultimately abiding submission to the authority (of Scripture and the Fathers) and the tendency to bolster ‘the faith,’ to demonstrate and to account through dialectic distinction and disputation in which through confrontation of opinions via the enumeration and balancing of rational arguments, finally, in the ‘solution one opinion is set aside and another supported based on the adduced arguments.” Brian Davies, “Thomas Aquinas,” in CPMA, 657, refers to the increasingly “typical verdict” that “Aquinas is ‘one of the dozen greatest philosophers of the western world,’” and Russell L. Friedman, “Latin Philosophy,” 1200-1350,” in OHMP, 209, “Aquinas was a rare philosophical genius, whose works display an unparalleled architectonic vision.” Then again, the admittedly “impressive” nature of anything does not and cannot determine its “quality.” A “tension” filled edifice, however imposing, may well prevent “occupancy.”

²⁸² See Kevin Swanson, *Apostate: The Men who Destroyed the Christian West* (Elizabeth, CO: Generations with Vision, 2013), 38. It is possible, according to Swanson, that 1 Tim. 1:7 may well “explain” Aquinas’ “confession.” He repeatedly and “royally” admits that “he does not really know what he is saying” about an unknowable God. This comes with the territory when the analogy concept is taken *seriously*. At the same time, “he makes confident assertions about the matters he covers.” This inescapable self-contradiction must be a heavy burden to bear, which must evoke our sympathy. But this kind of self-contradiction is inevitable when the intellect claims ultimacy or primacy. The intellect gets “stuck” in it every time it seeks to synthesize the two poles of any complementarity of truth that transcends the jurisdiction and range of the intellect. Only the sharpest of the elite thinkers will recognize this about others and about themselves. Apparently(?), Aquinas did. He undoubtedly espoused the primacy of the intellect in the light of his definition of a person, “the individual substance of a rational nature.” As a Semi-Pelagian he would not even have a hunch about the heart as the life-mission control center of the human existence that needs to be replaced in regeneration for the intellect to function properly by humbly staying within the parameters of its jurisdiction and range. The philosopher Martin Heidegger keenly recognized his self-contradiction as well, in both the earlier and later phase of his thinking. As a non-Christian he clearly held to the ultimacy of the intellect. It seems that Karl Barth whose post-Kantian theology structurally runs parallel to Heidegger’s equally post-Kantian philosophy never realized this.

moment recognized the utter futility of his *rational* endeavors. Who knows? But this self-deprecatory statement is overlooked or ignored not only in the Church of Rome at large, but also in both the early and recent Reformation *content*-scholasticism to this very day.

At this very juncture, the *fourth* line of argumentation comes understandably into view. This, of course, may well be (is undoubtedly?!) the most damaging one. As we saw already, according to Aquinas, his exposition in *Summa Theologiae*, I, Qu. 1-43 is an exercise in “speculative” theology. In it, as we saw, he (error-fully, while, if not *because* this is done *analogically*) focuses on the “essence of God,” how “God thinks his God-self,” in relationship to his perfections, to his Tri-personality, as well as “to things other than himself,” in which the *analogia entis* played a pivotal role. In this “speculative” type of context an eminent philosopher went on record in the 1960’s, in an extensively argued and well-documented analysis and assessment of the theology of Karl Barth, that venturing into “the secret things of God” is precisely what *both* Aquinas with his *analogia entis* and Barth with his *analogia historiae* were seeking to do.²⁸³ However, “to construe God” in this way is to saddle oneself and one’s often unsuspecting followers with an unconscionably high toll. “The biblical worship of the *known* (immanent) God who in his condescendence has truthfully and amply revealed himself, but unapologetically reserves his *secrets* for himself in his (transcendent) incomprehensibility simply goes by the board. But Karl Barth, as well as Thomas Aquinas, did in this regard “*transgress the boundary of the worship worthiness of God, and has - the admitted mortal man in his own estimation - penetrated into the essence of God*”²⁸⁴

But in each instance the confident verbalization of the unverbalizable did and had to suffer shipwreck. For a detailed analysis and assessment of Heidegger’s philosophy, see my doctoral dissertation, *From Bultmann to Ott* (1968), available in the Library of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. At any rate, I would not be surprised if Aquinas would have been aware, however dimly, of the criticism of the analogy concept that was eventually verbalized so pointedly by Duns Scotus. “Analogy necessarily collapses into equivocation unless there exists some underlying univocal concept” (See for this Stephen R. Holmes, “Attributes,” in OHST, 62). Of course, as I argue below, one does not have to fall victim to the univocity of Scotus to realize that his critique of Aquinas’s analogy hits home, just as in the much more recent Van Til-Clark controversy one does not have to embrace Clark’s univocity to recognize that Van Til’s concept of analogy is unacceptable.

²⁸³ For the relationship between the analogy of being-in-substance (Aquinas) and the analogy of being-in-act (Barth), see also Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 197ff.

²⁸⁴ Dr. S. U. Zuidema, *Confrontatie met Karl Barth* (Engl. Tr., *Confrontation with Karl Barth*) (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1963), 199-200. In a further publication, “Theologie en Wijsbegeerte in de ‘Kirchliche Dogmatik’ (of Karl Barth), in *Philosophia Reformata* (Vol. 18, 1953), 82, he once again brings up both the surface contrast and the underlying concord between the rationalist *analogia entis* of Aquinas and the irrationalist *analogia historiae* of Barth. Zuidema’s assessment of Aquinas is virtually echoed by Ury, TP, 29, who makes the observation, if not the charge, that much more than the East “Western theologians probe” and seek to “discern” “the mystery of the inner-trinitarian life.” Millard J. Erickson, “God and Change,” in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1 / 2 (1997), 51, perceptively shows that the pot calls the kettle black when a critical stance against Greek philosophical underpinnings is rooted in an alternate, equally unacceptable philosophical footing. In a word, in the case of Barth, his Kantian theology is no net gain over Aquinas’ Aristotelian one. This is clearly what Zuidema seeks to point out. In fact, it appears that Barth presents us with a worse scenario. Zuidema’s verdict does not need to imply that there is no difference between the two. Even if they carry the same type of tune, they sing a different verse with a different voice. Aquinas takes his point of departure in an infallible Scripture and a rock-like certain Doctrine of the Trinity. From there he *micro*-manages the essence of God with the help of a modified Aristotelianism. Barth rejects an inerrant Scripture and *macro*-manages the doctrine of God with the help of a Kantian philosophy and ends up with an Abstract Particular. They both seek to manage theo-ontologically. Therefore “Same Tune!” But their “Score” is not identical. Different philosophical verse. Neither is their “Voice” the same. Aquinas’ Aristotelian type of voice is a hybrid. It seeks to be symphonic with Scripture. But in reality it competes with Scripture because ultimately it thinks it can go deeper and do better. However, it leaves loose ends. Barth’s Kantian type of voice is cacophonous. It vacates Scripture

What this philosopher wishes to get across rings like an alarm bell, a wake-up call! His charge is unmistakable. The theo-ontology of both these giants in their own right clearly go after out-of-bounds “essence,” undoubtedly at the expense of “ethics” in the widest sense of the word, the ethics of a full-bodied Christianity that is governed by obedience to Christ’s Triple Command. Hence their undertakings are not *permissible* and therefore not *admissible*, both by explicit Divine prohibition. In a word, it should be rejected as samples of human arrogance and shunned like the plague.

While Barth receives our detailed attention below, this assessment of Aquinas, of course, would be nothing but “the kiss of death.” In fact, not only his massive and impressive “speculative” edifice but also all of the Medieval content-scholasticism with its preparatory building blocks that helped to construct it, its competing building blocks that sought to sanitize it, its contributing building blocks that aimed to improve it, and the added building blocks that meant to secure it in perpetuity simply would come crashing down, representing one gigantic but futile theo-ontological attempt or a series of at times antagonistic attempts mentally to penetrate the impenetrable.

In this assessment we (admittedly) come face to face with “a (prophetic) voice,” bolstered by a second one, which tells the ecclesiastical world that a basically arrogant “emperor” is essentially void of clothes. But, if this is only partly correct, all of us as second-tier thinkers who cover his theo-ontological edifice like an army of ants to explore it in all its nooks and

and takes a different route. It is destructive from beginning to end. Frankly, it never dawns on anybody to publish a book on *Christianity and Thomism* as if they do not and cannot coincide. But the volume *Christianity and Barthianism* has been written, correctly as well as thankfully so! Incidentally, Zuidema was a prominent member of a Philosophical Society that was spearheaded by Herman Dooyeweerd and his *New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (in four volumes) and publishes its Journal *Philosophia Reformata*. Dooyeweerd and his colleagues, such as Zuidema, consistently criticized both Aquinas and Barth in a plethora of excellent, perceptive, and penetrating articles in *Philosophia Reformata* that are regrettably only available to a Dutch audience. Aquinas is said to fall victim to the “form-matter” ground motive of Ancient Greek philosophy and Barth to the “nature-freedom” ground motive of Modern Continental philosophy. Frankly, I have no truck with this. The Form-Matter motive was, indeed, central in Platonic and post-Platonic philosophy, even if it was not always construed in the same fashion. The same applies to the Nature-Freedom motive in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy. But I wish to dig a little deeper. Both ground-motives are branches of the same underlying universality-particularity dialectic with Ancient Philosophy (by and large) assigning the ultimacy to the Universality pole and Modern Philosophy to the Particularity one. From this perspective, as the saying goes, Aquinas and Barth are “hostile brothers” (“feindliche Bruder”), and can be, if not must be identified as such. Their “products” should not merely be traced back to different ground motives, but to the same apostate root (which incidentally, I have not seen *explicitly* verbalized *as such* by either Dooyeweerd or Van Til). Further, Dooyeweerd produced a breakthrough when he identified the heart as the “Archimedean” point of all philosophy. But going through 30 years of *Philosophia Reformata* this insight really does not function much, if at all. There may be three reasons for this. First, Dooyeweerd declared the heart a supra-temporal entity. This drew understandably a lot of negative flak and in the process impinged upon, if not eclipsed the pivotal significance of the heart. Second, he did not point to the rebel heart as the culprit behind the fundamental dialectic. So, in one sense it was genuine coin of the realm, but at the same time “dead” capital of sorts. Third, in Dooyeweerd’s time Kuyper ruled the roost with his “presumptive regeneration.” So, a heart transplant, which is the biblical definition of regeneration (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3, 5) was a station that was passed already. I do not remember, growing up in Dooyeweerd’s backyard, of ever being told that I had to be born again. This was a “done deal.” I was assured of my “comfort in life and death” (Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. I) before I was asked whether I even was a believer in the first place. Finally, all this left a “gaping hole.” Not one article in the 30 years of *Philosophia Reformata* that I perused did I even see a hint that the only way to escape from the fundamental dialectic which spawned the two ground motives was a heart transplant in regeneration. Excellent diagnostic articles, even if not sufficiently radical. But no reference to the content of the New Covenant Gospel, promised by the Father, produced by the Son, and transported by the Holy Spirit, as the only antidote to sanitize apostate philosophies and theologies. It is no wonder that with such “gaping hole” secularization, such as in Dutch societal life, accelerates. The New Covenant Gospel must take center stage (again) or it is or will be “all over.”

crannies through the centuries in our near-innumerable (?) occasional references and voluminous writings, and in the process seek to decipher its enigmas, could well feel like the mourning merchants in Revelation 18 when they see the great city, that supplied them with such a luxurious living, simply collapse.²⁸⁵ To be sure, this is not to say that this edifice has no biblical, or even admirable features whatsoever. But it is to warn folks not to make it their full-time or even partial *residence*. It is built upon an unacceptable fault line that will make it collapse!

Of course, I recognize full well that this “voice” may, can, and possibly will be dismissed by a skeptic audience. But I request the readers of this volume at least to give its “echo” a hearing when we now turn to look at a few Reformed scholastics who have drunk deeply from the Thomist well, to find out whether this “voice” may have more, much more credibility than at first thought. I expect that the “sowing” of this “seed”-appeal will be welcomed in all good soil. After all, for the most part the “West” (in the footsteps of the once-thriving and equally deteriorated Middle East) is rapidly turning from a Post-Christian into an anti-Christian world. So, there must be something wrong in the State of Denmark. I expect that anyone who seeks to give a diagnosis in whole or in part with the avowed objective to find a cure for our ailing world will at the least receive a hearing. It is quite clear that Medieval and Post-Reformation scholasticism has not provided this cure. So, why should anyone give it even the impression that this is a “cure-much,” if not a “cure-all?” At any rate, who knows whether the diagnosis by a “voice,” in lockstep with a further one was divinely meant for a time like this. Maybe it paves the way for a Paradigm shift to occur. Such shifts have always been started by “lone voices” who invariably had a fight on their hands and were often martyred until they were recognized posthumously. That our (Western) world needs a Paradigm shift should be crystal-clear. Maybe only an earthquake can get us ready for one.

The *fifth* line of argument can be short. It pertains to the Medieval “type” of apologetics that Aquinas embraced, if not epitomized. In his Systematic Theology rational argumentation occupies centerstage. May the doctrines of Scripture, with the *imprimatur* of the ecclesiastical tradition (!), be what they are, it is the so-called philosophico-rational “handmaiden” that gives them their indisputably perennial rocklike status. This carries over in Aquinas’ apologetics. Apparently, the jury is (still) out about his Five Ways as presented in his (theological) *Summa Theologiae*. Are they meant to be “illustrative” or “demonstrative?” There is a difference of opinion about this, although the “illustrative” interpretation has the most defenders.²⁸⁶ But in his apologetic *Summa contra Gentiles*, he claims to be “demonstrative.” This dovetails with his Boethian definition of a person as an entity of a “rational” nature. This scholastic legacy was essentially adopted by Classic Reformed orthodoxy and found its way among its adherents up till today wherever the *fides quaerit intellectum* maxim is embraced.²⁸⁷ Enlightenment evidentialism bought into this as well. Post-modernity, of course, managed to scuttle the “demonstration” bandwagon and so redirected the apologetic enterprise. However, no apologetic method can stand the biblical light of day unless it turns into a Gospel apologetics. The reason for this simple as well as

²⁸⁵ Talking about “an army of ants,” Christopher Upham, “The Influence of Thomas Aquinas” in OHA, 525, speaks about “the interminable issue of how to interpret Aquinas.”

²⁸⁶ See also Beeke, RST, I, 252-253.

²⁸⁷ See, Fesko, RA, 212. Of course, the embrace of apologetics as a rational discipline does not need to deteriorate into rationalism! See also Beeke, RST, I, 252-255, 258-260.

profound. Apologetics addresses not just the (rational) mind. It addresses the person as created in the image of God. Since (1) this consists of its non-materiality, starting with the heart as its life-mission control center, and (2) this non-material tapestry, starting once again with the heart, is radically and totally corrupt, a proper (and a to be effective) apologetics addresses the radically and totally corrupt person, starting naturally with the heart, from which everything else springs (Prov. 4:23). Since according to Holy Writ only the *Gospel* can effect a heart transplant, it stands to eminent biblical reason that all apologetics should be a *Gospel* apologetics! This is (therefore) why we can “feast” upon Paul in Acts 17 when he addresses both the (Modernity) Stoics *and* the (Post-modernity) Epicureans with, ironically, the same Gospel Apologetics that lays the foundation for, paves the way to, and finds its climax in a summons to repentance! All this is a far cry from the Apologetics of Aquinas, from the Apologetics of his followers, and, for that matter, from all current Apologetic methodologies. None of them, as far as I know, lays the foundation for a summons to repentance, or even seeks to do so, as the only way out of the fallen human condition. At times such procedure is even rejected out of hand!

On balance, it is very well possible that not all these five lines of argument ring a decisive bell with folks. But all of them together should be sufficient to give everybody (lots of) pause and should bring all “blanket” endorsements of Aquinas to a (screeching?) halt!

By way of conclusion, if this analysis and assessment of the oeuvre of Aquinas as a questionable theo-ontological enterprise in content-scholasticism is compelling, it goes without saying that this has implications for the efforts of Bavinck scholastic-occasionally, and for the endeavors of Zanchi, Fesko, and Rennie scholastic-systematically to undergird truth and scholastic-apologetically to defend it. With all due and grateful respect for their commitment and their stand for truth, their embrace and adoption of Aquinas’ “handmaiden,” even if only partial, is regrettable for several reasons.

First, even in its time Medieval scholasticism left a barren landscape in its wake. This was hardly surprising. It sought to advance the Kingdom with the tools of a philosophy that Paul earmarked as “empty deceit,” a philosophy that essentially sought to eliminate the Triune God, and so to destroy his Kingdom and to imperil the souls of man.

Second, in the process it was lured into the trap to enter the incomprehensible “secrets” of God, if the “two prophetic voices” are any indication, rather than to honor the complementarity of truth in child-like faith.

Third, it sought to make God’s “secrets” systematically intelligible by and apologetically acceptable to the mind of man, rather than hiding and treasuring them in the life-mission control center of their heart and inviting others to follow suit.

Fourth, its predictable failure to establish compelling intelligibility repeatedly forced it to launch new efforts and as a result was responsible for endlessly misspending precious time and energy to arrive at the unreachable.

Fifth, most likely due to the circumvention of the heart, the necessary emphatic mention eagerly to abstain from sin (Ps. 119:11) and zealously to pursue the mandated Divine “ethics,” culminating in the Grand Triple Command of Jesus as “the only thing needful” is missing. It simply eluded them. It may have been overlooked or it was ignored.

Sixth, once the nose of the apostate philosophy camel is in the tent, it could not but adversely affect other elements in the edifice of Biblical doctrine, which catapulted the Reformation into existence.

Seventh, to top all this off and last, but not least, it should awaken the Church to pray for a Paradigm Shift in Apologetics. The widely *admitted* historical as well as personal failure of the current methodologies to “do the job” must be a powerful incentive at a minimum to take a hard look at this.

VII. A Preliminary Analysis

How even to take an initial, let alone definitive look at all this is far from an easy undertaking. But we must begin somewhere. For a starter, it is generally agreed that there is “a consensus in contemporary scholarship that ‘scholasticism,’ properly understood indicates a method, capable of presenting and arguing a variety of theological and philosophical conclusions and not particular theology or philosophy.”²⁸⁸ This is usually interpreted as giving Reformed orthodoxy an “untainted” bill of health. Method-wise it was a bedfellow of medieval, usually, if not especially Thomist scholasticism. Content-wise, however, it totally aligned itself with the Reformation. In other words, its *song-tune* portrayed Medieval scholasticism. But its *song-lyrics* was Reformed to the core. That this “interpretation” presents a neat and attractive, if not a persuasive package is undeniable. In fact, it undoubtedly is a needed corrective of the view that unrestricted discontinuity is the bottom line. This “discontinuity” reasoning goes as follows. If Reformed orthodoxy is continuous with the Medieval scholastics it is discontinuous with the Reformation. However, if it continuous with the Reformation, it is discontinuous with the Medieval scholastics. Such reasoning has been properly discredited. But with this the correctors are not totally out of the woods. They fail to ask the question whether Reformed orthodoxy, in contrast to the Reformers, were enticed to incorporate some of the tenets or approaches of the Medievals that tainted their content, even if their method as method could not and still cannot be faulted. The questioning critics of the new interpretation apparently are persuaded that with the method, tainted content did, and could not but sneak in. In other words, the correctors may not have covered every base. I find it difficult to come up with a different assessment since I deem it, in fact, found it undeniable that the metaphysical *content*-Aristotelianism left its indelible imprint on Thomist Medieval scholasticism as well as on the later Reformation scholasticism which followed in its wake.²⁸⁹ While the *method* variety of scholasticism that utilizes Aristotle’s laws of logic should not necessarily raise eyebrows, the *content* type is a different matter altogether. Already in the Middle Ages this proved to be very controversial, resulting in fierce infighting for whatever to be specified reasons.²⁹⁰ The battles between Augustinian Franciscans and Aristotelian

²⁸⁸ See Muller, PRRD, I, 35. In short, “scholasticism” spells (universal) method rather than (particular) content. It is a “relatively uniform method of exposition, with its clear structure, its patterns of reasoning and standard practices of making distinctions, neatly dividing and subdividing topics, its brief citations of texts, its monotonous use of formulae, and its impersonality of style (which) serves to hide the variety of its actual contents,” all this “despite the persistence of a few writers who insist, admittedly by way of minority report, that ‘scholasticism’ brings with it a set of particular theological and philosophical concerns.”

²⁸⁹ See Muller, PRRD, I, 40-41, 52, 71-74, 84, 119-121, 141-143, 145, 355, 361, 363, 367-369, 371, 373, 376, 381, 396, 446. Repeatedly reference is made to “Christian Aristotelianism,” even if the influence of Augustinianism and nominalism have modified Thomism somewhat.

²⁹⁰ The names of Bonaventure, Henry van Ghent, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham come to mind. When Peter Vermigli uses “simplicity to buttress the doctrine of predestination,” and asks whether in the decree of predestination Divine will precedes the Divine understanding, or vice versa, he dismisses that as “a needless discussion,” and adds, “Any who wish to know such things I send to Scotus and Thomas.” Should we detect a sense of humor in this statement? Or of exasperation? Or should we take this as a veiled critique of an all too theo-ontological treatment of biblical truths? At any rate, see for this, Long, PSTG, 147.

Dominicans, between realists and nominalists were aggressive and never-ending.²⁹¹ To survey these battles at present, beyond what I covered already, would be too daunting an undertaking, and candidly, is not necessary for the purpose of the present volume. But some searching background checks will serve my objective of showing that there is more than meets or met the eye. These checks are rooted in and arise from a (1) Transcendental as well as (2) Scriptural (3) Gospel apologetics. Let me cover all three components in short order.

First, there is every reason to hold that the necessary and sufficient (i.e., *transcendental*) conditions for both the Medieval and Reformed *content*-scholasticism is to be found in the Plato/Aristotle/Plotinus tradition. As mentioned already, with his Theory of Immanent Forms (versus the Platonic Theory of Transcendental Forms)²⁹² Aristotle sought to solve the one-and-many problem and ended up with the Absolute Universal (the one) as his “godhead” (together with its list of inevitable attributes of eternity, immutability, impassibility, etc.), which was *not* (to be) contaminated with any type of particularity (the many).²⁹³ Plotinus recognized Aristotle’s failure to solve the universality-particularity problem and posited a “Supreme One,” designated as a “(necessarily) Nameless One,” or as *buthos* (unfathomable depth), that supposedly gave rise to both the one *and* the many, as his own (equally failed) solution.²⁹⁴ To be sure, the Church repudiated the idea of a static, lifeless, impersonal

²⁹¹ See Bavinck, RD, I, 141-149, 151-154.

²⁹² See for this, Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I, 1, 226-228.

²⁹³ Aristotle’s scale or chain of Being has Pure Form (The Abstract Universal) on the top and Brute Matter (Concrete Particularity) on the bottom. As we saw, he distanced himself from Plato’s bifurcated reality with the Transcendental Forms (Universal Ideas) in the “Upper Story” and Matter (brute particulars) in the “Lower One,” by positing the concept of Immanent Forms, in which the lower Form is matter for the higher Form. However, Pure Form has no connection with a lower Form as its matter and Brute Matter has no connection with higher matter as its Form. The failure to synthesize Form and Matter became Aristotle’s undoing. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I, 1, 205, 227-228, indicates that the very *chorismos*, that is, the wide and unbridgeable rift between Form (the universals) and Matter (the particulars), that Aristotle attacks in Plato is just as wide and unbridgeable in Aristotle as well. Both were victimized by the fundamental dialectic that their apostasy spawned and subsequently hamstrung them.

²⁹⁴ It was, indeed, Aristotle’s undoing that spawned Plotinus. Once again, he posited the “unconditioned condition of everything,” the Supreme, All-Transcendent Nameless One, or *Buthos*, as supposedly the Originating Origin for both Form (Universality) and Matter (Particularity). “If there were nothing outside all alliance (universality) and compromise (particularity), nothing authentically one, there would be no Source,” quoted in Wolterstorff, IG, 108-109. See Jens Halfwassen, in RHN, 182-199, for Plotinus’ “philosophy of the Simple-One,” (The “*Super-One*”) as the indispensable Basis, the necessary Condition, the all-preceding Principle, the all-transcending Absolute of all multiplicity, of all beings, inclusive of all thought, and therewith of all the “Many” (!), which by definition excludes the “equal priority” of “The One and the Many,” and can only be reached (?) by the self-transcending ascent of ineffable *ekstasis*, a mystical “event” (?) beyond all thought, a veritable “escape in solitude to the solitary.” It is understandable how the Church could have been enamored by the emphasis upon “simplicity” and for that reason could have incorporated this in its repertoire to explain the self-sufficiency of a simple and sovereign God. But it is not clear why it was not immediately rejected as a radical suppression of the biblical Trinitarian truth, and therefore as a Trojan Horse. After all, God is the Uncreated One and Many, simultaneously the *De Deo Uno* and the *De Deo Trino*. He does not need a Concentration point behind him that synthesizes the two. Even the “hypothesis” of such a point is utterly offensive, and the search for one adds folly to injury. At any rate, the very fact, of course, that Plotinus *named*, in fact, as a prophet-philosopher *had to name* the *Nameless* One was the end of him as well. Furthermore, it should never have gone unnoticed that all philosophers, whether of the Ancient or Modern variety, unceremoniously buried their predecessors and at times (often?) recognized that they had to bury themselves. This put us on the trail of two tragedies. The first one is the innumerable times that the Church, overcome by the unquestioned and at times brilliant erudition of these philosophers, decided to incorporate their thinking patterns into their theologizing. This caused immense self-inflicted and consequent suffering, whether it was experienced as such or not. With their failure or refusal to disseminate both the unadulterated Gospel and the unsullied Word of God in lieu of their ultimately

“unmoved mover,” etc.,²⁹⁵ but was impressed by the concept of “namelessness.” In the light (read: darkness) of all this the question arises why it would use and walk the “pathway” of both these thinkers, a pathway that aimed to sidestep and suppress the Triune God of Scripture, ironically in order to arrive at the Triune God of Scripture (with all his Scripture-designated attributes), who is the antipode of an Aristotelian “godhead” and in his Self-disclosure is poles apart from a Plotinus-like “namelessness?” Well, it is argued that the Name with which God designates himself in Exodus 3:14, JHWH, translated as “I am ‘Pure Being,’” paved the way to a Being-ontology that was remarkably similar, with its attributes and all, to the one that Aristotle pursued and that eventually crystallized in the *analogia entis* theory of Aquinas.²⁹⁶ While this was watered down some in the scholasticism of Reformed orthodoxy, it was not resolutely shown the door.²⁹⁷

“empty deceit,” the loss of souls (Mt. 28:19) and the shortfall of holiness (Mt. 28:20) must have been staggering. This still must be the case today whenever philosophical futility and fraudulence worm their way into anybody’s theology! The second tragedy is a theological enterprise, academic or otherwise, that makes its contribution, scholarly or otherwise, to the ever-ongoing basically sterile and inconsequential discussions, philosophically or otherwise, without recognition that they handle the ins and outs of and at best spruce up “empty deceit,” brilliant or otherwise, and show this lack by being devoid of a Paul-like “burden for souls and holiness.” Incidentally, Martin Heidegger was the mirror image of Plotinus in Modern Philosophy. For the Plotinian conundrum not to be able “to offer a cognitive construal of predications concerning God,” which he shared with Kant, and therefore also with Heidegger and Barth, see Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 109.

²⁹⁵ This is explicit in Muller, PRRD, I, 382.

²⁹⁶ For the pivotal function in Aquinas of both Ex. 3:14 and John 14:6 in intimate conjunction with it, see Long, PSTG, 17, 70-81. According to Muller, PRRD, I, 234, not only Duns Scotus, and the nominalists in his wake, but also “all the formulators of Protestant theology denied the Thomist *analogia entis* and declared that no proportion exists between the finite and the infinite.” There is little doubt that Aquinas’ later opponents, Duns Scotus and his ilk being the earlier ones, came to reject the *analogia entis* because of their nominalism. Their apothegm is, “There is nothing general except names.” So, no sharing of “being” in whatever way and to whatever degree. This, however, is the peak of an iceberg. Nominalists are unalterably opposed to the Platonic type of universals, whether they are called Forms or Ideas or otherwise, to which the particulars would correspond either by participation or imitation. In opting for the primacy of particularity, whether consciously or not, they declared themselves combatants in the arena of apostate philosophy with its warfare between those who ascribed ultimacy to the universals and those who favored particularity in the perennial attempts on the part of both “parties” to synthesize the two. The inevitable conclusion is that Aquinas and folks, such as Scotus and others, took opposite sides in the same arena, were essentially infected with the same apostate virus, and were participants in the same endless and laborious Sisyphus search to accomplish the impossible. If this is correct, Medieval scholasticism in its totality must be shown the door of the Church, even if some of its components, such as common grace methodology, may be welcomed like parts of “a junkyard.” However, where Scotus rejected the *analogia entis*, due to his common sense(?), Protestant theology opposed it because it violated the Biblical Creator-creature distinction. Here we encounter a world of difference! Scotus and Protestant theology were not “bed-fellows,” even if they were co-belligerents. Incidentally, when scholars allegedly detect nominalist tendencies in Calvin, a word of (extreme?) caution is in place. They better research carefully the “why” and the “how” of the “what” of Calvin’s statements before they conclude to “synonymity.” For example, Muller, PRRD, I, 383, theorizes that “the Scotist and nominalist contention that rationally deducible concepts and theological system do not necessarily stand in any relation to each other,” which comes down to a “radical diastasis between philosophical, specifically metaphysical, argument and theological argument” ... “most probably underlies the early Reformation rejection of the use of philosophy in theological formulation.” This, of course, would also apply to Calvin. Candidly, I am inclined to demur politely. It seems much preferable to explain the “hesitation” of the early Reformation, including of Calvin’s explicit “hesitation,” by a distaste for philosophical concepts and models that as an integral part of a pagan worldview, such as Aristotle’s, would be inimical to Biblical Truth. See for this as a distinct possibility, also Muller, PDDR, I, 361.

²⁹⁷ It may be necessary to explain the anomaly to do so. Greek Philosophy is driven by the Form (Universality)-Matter (Particularity) dialectic. Plato ascribed a transcendent and transcendental metaphysical reality to the Forms with

At any rate, all this led to a double irreducible foundation point from which to proceed, a *principium essendi* (of being) and a *principium cognoscendi* (of knowledge).²⁹⁸ Of course, metaphysically God as the Creator-Cause is the prior top-down *principium essendi*. As such, he was said once and for all to be and ever to remain the incomprehensible, all-transcendent (Aristotelian) *Actus Purus*, to be equated with JHWH. But epistemologically the creation-effect is the *principium cognoscendi*. This explains the indispensable need for the threefold *via*. There is no other way to reach the top than from the bottom up, from the effect to its cause. Candidly, even while this twofold *principium* was often acknowledged by the orthodox Reformed scholastics,²⁹⁹ still the commitment to the principle of *Sola Scriptura* added another essential dimension to their *modus operandi*. For one, the Reformed scholastics “set

Matter their shadowy mirror image. However as Storig, I, I, 156-157, correctly argues, Plato does not bridge the gap between what he regards to be the only metaphysically real, namely the eternal, self-existent, inaccessible, immutable archetypal Forms or Ideas and what he portrays as their shadowy and weak mirror image, namely the “stuff” (Matter) of the temporal, tangible, ever shifting ectypal particulars. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I/1, 227-228, decidedly agrees with this, “Plato’s Theory of Forms is unsatisfactory. His philosophy inevitably (!) involves a *Chorismos* (rift) between the intelligible and the purely sensible world, and it is useless to slur over the fact.” This prompted Aristotle to shift ground. To him “true reality” was no longer to be found in the realm of the rational transcendent Ideas, but rather in the observable every-day particulars! This allowed him to develop his theory of the Immanence of Forms. Understandably every Form, defined as *Actus*, needs Matter to be Formed. But Matter on its own has no existence and of its own not even reality. It is mere Potency only. However, it can and will reach the phase of reality through the Forms that are empowered by an inner drive to give it reality. In the Chain of Being a lower Form (*Actus*) serves as Matter (Potency) for a higher Form. This turns it into a Hierarchical Scale of Being. But here is the kicker. Matter is not something “passive” simply to be realized at the bidding of Forms. Despite of its lack of reality it offers “resistance” to its Formation. This puts the Scale of Being in perspective. At the bottom of the Scale is “Pure Matter” (*Potentia Pura*). At this point the “resistance” appears to be total. At the top is “Pure Form” (*Actus Purus*). It seems to pay Matter back in kind. In a word, the philosophical antagonism between Form and Matter is fundamental. Frankly, in the light of all this it seems gullible, to say the least, for any theologian to import this type of metaphysical “grammar” into one’s “language” to explain, protect or defend the God of Scripture. God is *not Actus Purus* by any stretch of the imagination. He has no antagonistic relationship to what is a non-existing, unreal (and recalcitrant) “notion,” called “Potency” either! Of course, behind Aristotelianism hovers the fundamental dialectic as its driving force, a dialectic that pits universality against particularity. God is the glorious harmonious ontological Archetype of both with its equally glorious harmonious ontological mirror image in the ubiquitous one and many spheres. Only contrastive apostate thinking and acting can and does rip these spheres to shreds, after it already ripped their Archetype apart. Let us not use this “ripping” type of thinking to establish “Theology Proper.” With “friends” who do or are inclined to do so, God may not need “enemies!” For more input on the fundamental trademarks of Aristotelian philosophy, especially his emphasis upon the Particulars as the “truly real,” in contrast to the Platonic view that ascribed “true reality” to the Universals, and the “fall-out” of this contrast in the Medieval battle between Realists and Nominalists, see Storig, *Geschiedenis van de Filosofie*, I, 174-175, 227-228. Not so incidentally, this should also put the skids on the application of the Being-becoming “grammar” to the “language” regarding the God of Scripture. It is “same tune, different verse.” Greek Philosophy is marked by “contrast” to the highest order, however dressed up. Universality, Form, Actus, Being, the Absolute, or the One is pitted against Particularity, Potency, Becoming, the Relative, or the Many. This underlying and controlling “grammar,” whatever the terminology, bristles with hostility against Biblical Truth. Let me spell it out once more in virtually capital lettering. If the “Greeks” has succeeded in demonstrating their contrastive philosophy, the Triune God of Scripture would have been DOA. Hence, they should be shown the door, and not even be allowed in the gate. The recognition that a Trojan Horse can only gain entrance when a protecting wall is broken down should give one pause. See yet for the questionable contours of what may be designated as “Greek ‘Grammar,’” that controls the “thinking process” and its outcome, Copleston, I/1, 227.

²⁹⁸ For an extensive treatment of this twofold *principium*, see Muller, PRRD, I, 430-440. In PRRD, I, 430-431, he argues that the commitment to or adoption of one or more “first principles,” *principia, archai*, irreducible grounds, from which any item or entity comes into being or becomes known, and therefore functions as a starting point for a persuasively plausible or necessary explanation of fundamental articles of whatever sort, is due to Aristotle’s declaration, if not insistence to that effect.

²⁹⁹ Muller, PRRD, I, 433-437.

aside the authority of the Church over the meaning of the text”³⁰⁰ and, for another, they were not inclined uncritically to swallow the Medieval bottom-up type of scholasticism hook line and sinker. The *Sola Scriptura* principle of the Reformation had them arrive at God as the metaphysical *principium essendi*, “the Divine archetype as the ultimate and essential foundation of theology,” by means of the authoritative content of *Scripture* as the epistemological *principium cognoscendi*, “the authoritatively and infallibly given cognitive foundation of theology.”³⁰¹ In other words, just as in the case of all Biblical truths they held that also in the verbalization of the Doctrine of God one should essentially start from the top, the Word of God, to end up at the top, the God of that Word.

Nevertheless, in their attempt “no longer (just *Scripturally*) to reform the church, by basic discursive, rhetorical, catechetical, and hortatory instruction,” but “(apologetically) to protect and establish (italics, mine) it” by securing for it, and settling it on a solid and enduring doctrinal footing by means of “a more sophisticated, rigorous and dialectical synthetic a priori model.”³⁰² they frequently were enticed to follow the *operational* use of the *Medieval duplex principium*, and reach the top from the bottom up. This comes to light when it was argued that “in a true *natural* theology *Scripture* cannot be the *principium cognoscendi*, even if it is sanctioned by *Scripture*. This is said to be indisputable, even if “*Scripture* is and remains the *principium cognoscendi* of revealed theology.” It is allegedly imperative to designate “nature as the *principium cognoscendi* of natural theology.”³⁰³ To the extent the latter determined their theologizing enterprise, Reformed scholastics did not only adopt a rigorous *methodology* via an Aristotelian inspired Aquinas, but also embraced an Aristotelian/Plotinian *content* scholasticism via that same Aquinas, as evidenced in the previous section, even if they rejected many Aristotelian/Plotinian tenets.³⁰⁴

This is intertwined with what may well be the perennial issue of the role of “reason” in the history of theology. In Reformed scholasticism it is said to be “not primary and despotic,” but “ministerial and instrumental.”³⁰⁵ This looks promising. Any kind of rationalism is “out” by definition.³⁰⁶ But it does not answer a variety of questions. For a starter, there is no such entity as “reason.” This would be Platonic. There are only “thinking (reasoning) agents.” Apart from angelic ones, this leaves the “human” kind. But this kind comes with a lot of baggage. To be sure, it is created in the image of God. This is to say, it is a spiritual (non-material) being. As mentioned already, it comes with a heart as its life-mission control center. It has three internal functions, thinking, willing, and feeling. It has two dimensions, moral and social. It has creative imagination. And it speaks/responds and acts/reacts. All of this is designed for mankind to take dominion on the waterfront of life. But in all its spiritual aspects it is radically seared and totally corrupt.³⁰⁷ To restrict myself to the philosophical enterprise, it starts with and from a rebellious and blind life-mission control center. Hence the need for a heart transplant in regeneration (Ezek. 36:25; John 3:3, 5)! Then it produces, by intention and in actual fact, “thinkings” that are only evil continually in motivation,

³⁰⁰ Muller, PRRD, I, 437.

³⁰¹ Muller, PRRD, I, 433-434.

³⁰² Muller, PRRD, I, 60, 448.

³⁰³ See Muller, PRRD, I, 36.

³⁰⁴ See yet, Muller, PRRD, I, 121-122, 141-143, 145, 194-197, 209, 297, 307-308, 360-382; Muller, PRRD1, I, 170-171.

³⁰⁵ Muller, PRRD, I, 400.

³⁰⁶ See for this, Muller, PRRD, I, 443-445.

³⁰⁷ See also, Muller, PRRD, I, 283-284

nature and aim (Gen. 6:5)!! Now the questions abound. Should we not investigate where philosophical thinkings come from, what they are and where they want to end up? This provides depth perspective to Paul's diagnosis of "empty deceit." It is often argued that Paul does not condemn philosophy as such. Only corrupt philosophy!³⁰⁸ This may very well be true and sounds like a good argument. But there is one problem with it. In Paul's days there was *only* corrupt philosophy. Hence his assessment was universal! This, then, undoubtedly also covers the philosophical stories which are added to the edifice that had been or was in the process of being constructed in Paul's days. This would include Modern Western philosophy as well as Indian philosophies of the Hindu, Buddhist, and other varieties.

The bottom line is this. Can any "empty deceitful" philosophy as an enterprise that seeks to give a rational accounting of the totality of reality without leaving any loose ends, apart from the Triune God, in defiance of the Triune God, and ultimately aiming at the extinction of the Triune God, ever serve as a "handmaiden" for a theology that operates under the aegis of the Triune God, in submission to the Triune God, and aims to exalt the Triune God?

Of course, this is not at all to say that Medieval and Reformed scholasticism by using this "handmaiden" rationalistically sought to ground a "later" revelational theology on an "earlier" so-called natural theology.³⁰⁹ No, both were committed to the content of Scripture as their starting point,³¹⁰ with the understanding that *Reformed* scholasticism (1) had "faith as the point of entry" to its truth³¹¹ and as such was less inclined to theoretical speculation, and (2) had the "praxis" of truth as its grand objective.³¹² Neither is it to say that their use of universal logic, whether formulated by Aristotle or others, necessarily waves a red flag. Not at all! Without this use communication is virtually impossible.

³⁰⁸ See for this at length, Turretin, IET, I, 46-47; see also, Muller, PRRD, I, 365-367.

³⁰⁹ Muller, PRRD, I, 300-303, 443, 446-447; PRRD1, I, 190, repeatedly registers a "strenuous" objection to this "all-too frequently and erroneous claim that orthodox or scholastic Protestant theology generally viewed natural revelation and the natural theology drawn from it as a foundation on which supernatural revelation and a supernatural theology can build."

³¹⁰ Muller, PRRD, I, 445.

³¹¹ Muller, PRRD, I, 445.

³¹² See Muller, PRRD, I, 448-450. According to PRRD, I, 210-212, 217-219, "praxis" does not only encompass practical godliness of heart and mind in a life of faith and obedience through the personal and prayerful appropriation of the doctrines of Holy Writ, but also the true worship of God and Gospel outreach aiming at the salvation of sinners. See yet, PRRD, I, 450, for the following conclusion, "The establishment of orthodoxy or 'right teaching' through scholastic method and the establishment of ties to the tradition through recourse to patristic and medieval sources manifest a successful process of institutionalization and catholicization. To fault the Protestant scholastics for producing an all-encompassing system of right teaching and thereby 'domesticating' the dynamic theology of the Reformation is, in fact, to fault Protestantism for its success in surviving as a church. Protestant orthodox theology is different from the theology of the Reformation - more so in form than in substance - but it is this very difference that marks its historical and doctrinal importance in the life of the Protestant churches." This is fully in line with the already quoted opening statement of PRRD, I, 27, that "The Reformation is incomplete without its confessional and doctrinal codification. What is more, Protestantism could not have survived if it had not developed, in the era of orthodoxy, a normative and defensible body of doctrine consisting of a confessional foundation and systematic elaboration." Muller is often, if not commonly quoted as the ultimate authority on Post-Reformation Scholasticism, obviously due to the near-extreme length he goes to analyze and assess it as well as to the incontestable erudition and penetrating insights he offers in his publications. But it may well be that he should have been (a little?) more open to its questionable continuity with both the Medieval Scholastic and the Reformers. To be sure, he properly rejects the Negative Continuity as well as the extreme "Calvin *versus* Calvinists" theses. But it may well have been too continuous with the Medievals and too discontinuous with the Reformers. Folks who quote Muller (and other authorities on Scholastic methodology) usually seem to hold to a virtually seamless substantive relationship to both. This seems questionable. But more about this in **Spotlight XII**.

But it is certainly to say that they routinely used an (apostate) philosophical and a (supposed) independently valid “handmaiden” to nail down Scripture truth, which allegedly, as we saw, *of all things*, “cannot (italics, mine) be sufficiently explained or *even* (italics, mine) understood unless that which is offered to us by (apostate, addition mine) Philosophy (capital “P” in the original) is accepted and applied” ... Therefore, it does stand in need of such philosophy, that is *content* philosophy, to arrive “at a better understanding of what the Scriptures say about God.”³¹³ Both these statements, of course, are unconscionable on the face of it, undermining the unquestionable sufficiency of Scripture, and for that matter putting its indisputable perspicuity and final authority at risk as well. All, because ‘Classic’ Orthodox Reformed scholasticism, at least in several (many?) of its protagonists, turned into a hybrid! Yes, (doctrinally) *Sola Scriptura*, by all means! But it must be bolstered (explanatorily and apologetically) with the help of apostate thinking, often exemplified, as argued in detail below, by the use of the three *viae*, *causalitatis*, *negationis*, and *eminentiae*, and the triad of equivocity, analogy and univocity, to protect and undergird it, if not to establish it and have it stand on its own two feet.³¹⁴ Apart from the fact that this kind of

³¹³ This is in the same general ballpark of the conviction of Anthony Burgess (d. 1664), in the words of a commentator (Fesko, RA, 22), that “Scripture provides truth and reason hammers it for greater understanding,” just as a “smith” takes a lump of gold and “beats it into what shape he pleases.” This should give folks grey hair! I cannot see how this can be quoted without at least some apprehension.

³¹⁴ I cannot but agree with the assessment of Fesko, 71-96, esp. 74-81, that the theo-ontology of Aquinas, inclusive of his five ways to arrive at God is not a “natural theology” that seeks to deliver rational proof about the essence or the existence of God. But I disagree with him that we can stop at this assessment as the “final” word in the matter, and so give him a clean bill of health. His apologetics from the bottom up is and remains his Achilles’ heel. He shares this with traditional apologetics, from rationality, morality, etc. to God, with evidential apologetics, from facts and logic to God, and with presuppositional apologetics, from the theory of facts and logic to God. Fesko, 89-90, holds that in Aquinas the bottom-up approach, in which he “reasons his way back to God by tracing the effects back to their cause is only limited in nature ... because the Bible says that this is a proper procedure.” Candidly, this is not the best of all reasonings. If the Bible gives it its imprimatur, go for it, full tilt! It does not need to be a limited process. The issue, of course, is whether Scripture endorses it. Earlier in this volume I questioned this. At any rate, all by themselves and simply on their own merits, all types of bottom-up apologetics basically cannot be anything else but be or end up as “probability” apologetics. After all, none of them do or can deliver “compelling proof,” all possible protestations to the contrary. Without much fanfare, Neo-Presuppositionalism, which puts all its eggs in the basket of “Persuasion,” and therefore can be earmarked as “Persuasion Apologetics,” has come to this very same conclusion. No one has ever delivered ‘absolute, compelling syllogistic proof.’ “It is (too) hard to come by” (See for this, Oliphint, CA, 87-122, esp. 105, 107-108, 110). Of course, I did already and therefore would add, “no one ever *can* succeed, because it is not in the jurisdiction of finite man.” In all candor, “probability” apologetics flies in the face of Rom. 1:18-20. “Everyone knows God but suppresses his truth!” When God’s friends tell everyone that his existence is only “probable,” he hardly needs enemies. Of course, this is not the context to enlarge on this much. But, once again, a Biblical Apologetics does *not* address the mind unto agreement, *but* the heart unto repentance, if Peter (Acts 3:18) and Paul (Acts 17:30) are any indication. Here is the fault-line between the various types of apologetics that are current today and the apologetics we encounter in Scripture. At any rate, it is precisely the rebellious heart suppression of the truth that calls for, in fact, demands a summons to repentance. No wonder that God commands it! Clearly, Aquinas is not even in the ballpark! Incidentally, according to Muller, PRRD, I, 209, Orthodox Reformed scholasticism holds that “theological certainty or the certainty of faith is not a matter of either probability or demonstration. Rather theological certainty is an absolute and infallible certainty that rests upon the truth of God’s revelation as accepted by faith” (Compare, Turretin, IET, 19, 68-69 I, vi, 5; II, iv, 22).” Hence all its reasoning invariably starts with theological certainty that seeks to proclaim and explain rather than demonstrate. As such, it would put a question mark behind the apologetics of both Evidentialism that ends up with the uncertainty of “probability” and Presuppositionalism that aims at syllogistically “demonstrated” certainty. The former is biblically unacceptable. Paul tells us that all mankind does know God (Rom. 1:20). This exposes “probability” Apologetics as counterbiblical. The latter is not obtainable. “Proof” Apologetics is not in the jurisdiction of man, as Neo-Presuppositionalism avers as well. It is equally anti-biblical. Frankly, it has

rationalizing may well have opened the door to the later rationalism and definitely not provide the “wherewithal” to prevent it, there is one more dimension to consider.

Here we arrive at the *second* consideration. This pertains to the place, function, and glory as well as the necessity, sufficiency, and transparency of Scripture in the formulation, the defense, and so the effective transmission of Biblical Doctrine. Starting with the *necessity* of Scripture, unless it is the centerpiece from start to finish, scholasticism has no convicting power, is no saving power, can at best arrive at mental agreement, and that is a dead-end street. If in addition to this it is part of a Medieval Thomist Semi-Pelagianism, it is oblivious of the need of a heart transplant in regeneration, will not apologetically aim at that, and cannot but be “dead on arrival!”

The *sufficiency of Scripture* is at stake here as well. The Scriptures clearly teach Divine Immutability (Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17). So, let us exegetically by all means, explain all the pertinent passages in their contexts, subsequently systematize their contents to arrive at the total picture, and consequently apply the truths gleaned or mined from them! That honors the Reformation. Scripture (*Scriptura*) alone (*Sola*) and all of it (*Tota*). No need for alien “handmaidens” to shore up its truth, let alone “handmaidens” of the apostate philosophical sort. In short, don’t go beyond Scripture (*Scriptura*), don’t go beside Scripture (*Sola*), and don’t fall short of Scripture (*Tota*). This is more than enough by Divine fiat! Therefore, it should be more than enough!

Further, Scripture does not even begin to suggest a purely metaphysical Being-theology in Exodus 3:14. Upon Moses’ message, he fears that the Israelites after four hundred (!) years of Divine silence would be inclined to ask, “What is his Name?” In this they would not be after his “identity,” his “essence,” but after his “reputation.” “Who are you, anyway?” “Where have you been?” “What took you so long?” For four hundred years, plus? After centuries of miserable and dehumanizing slavery, “I am ‘Pure, Absolute, Being,’” as has been suggested, would not be a very pertinent, let alone encouraging answer. God heard the groaning cry of his people in their seemingly unending bondage, remembered his covenant, took notice of their situation (Ex. 2:23-25), and decided to come to their rescue and make a substantial difference. So, the only possible translation that fits is, “I am ‘Action-Presence,’ possibly more precise, my name spells “Rescue-Presence” and I am going to demonstrate this name and put it on unforgettable display. You wait and see!”³¹⁵ This is in line with, if

become increasingly clear that every attempt to deliver it, syllogistically or otherwise, has been unsuccessful. Such “proof” does not and cannot exist. God does not and will not have it! It would put man in the all-determining saddle. Ironically, while Scripture already vitiates the notion of “absolutely compelling proof” which would be in the jurisdiction of mankind, Post-modernity has made everyone a believer by demolishing Enlightenment Modernity and its unobtainable foundationalism! But apart from all this, as we saw, the bottom-up approach is an apostate philosophy infested undertaking. So, it must be rejected, and should be ostracized from any legitimate theological process.

³¹⁵ See also Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 308, “How does the divine self-revelation (“I am who/what I am) answer the people’s question in Ex. 3:13 (‘What is his character, authority and reputation’), validating the mission of Moses and disclosing the authority of the divine deliverer? The answer is in the verb “to be” (*hajah*), which floods this narrative. Clearly, the use of this verb in Ex. 3:10-15 implies more than ontological being (!!). The use of *haiah* in the context of God’s mighty and miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the exercise of his judgment on the oppressing nation implies both his *dynamic presence* and his *dynamic activity* (italics, mine). The arena of human history is about to experience a dynamic intrusion of the divine,” and 317, “The divine declaration JHWH ANI (I am JHWH) is used like the bookends in Ex. 6:2-8. The passage begins and ends with this divine self-identification and it occurs twice more within the passage. Throughout the text, the divine name is connected with a torrent of verbs and phrases that describe the Lord’s *redemptive activity* (italics, mine) on behalf of his people.”

not echoes John Calvin, “I do not approve of the subtle speculations of those who think the name of God means nothing else but God himself. It ought rather to be referred to the works and the properties by which he is known than to his essence.”³¹⁶ In short, Israel can count on it that God will take “Action,” will come to the “Rescue” in his hands-on intervention. At the same time, the awesome type of active and rescuing intervention that is held out in prospect also displays the majestic and towering nature of this “Presence.” So, JHWH stands for the sum-total of God’s perfections that will come to the rescue and in that very process puts the very glory of the “I AM” on unforgettable display. While this sum-total is not identified in detail, eventually it will all come out in the open. The possible translation of “I am what I am” as “I will be who I will be” would entail this. All this runs remarkable parallel to the “I am” series with which Jesus identifies himself. Most of them, such as “I am the bread of life,” etc., pertain to the glory of his Active (redemptive) Rescue (John 6:35, 48; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), two of them to the glory of his Majestic (towering and overpowering) Presence, his eternity (John 8:58) and his omnipotence (John 18:5, 6), and one possibly to his Deity (John 13:19).

All this goes to say that Exodus 3:14 does not show a trace of what philosophical metaphysics portray as the “Absolute It,” even if this metaphysics uses some of the same terminology to identify *its* “It.” It is somewhat ironic to observe efforts to describe an unknowable and empty Absolute in terms that, by definition, must be empty, and hence deceitful (!), as well.³¹⁷ All this is pivotal to recognize and endorse, since the trajectory of the

³¹⁶ Quoted in Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God*, 143. For those who are similarly inclined, see Bavinck, RD, 130, “JHWH is the God of the fathers, the Unchangeable One, the Faithful One, the eternally Self-consistent One, who never leaves or forsakes his people ... (Is. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 44:6; 48:12) ... His aseity underlies this view of God, but it is not in the foreground nor directly expressed in the name;” and Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 231-232, “It is probably true, as many scholars and theologians in recent decades have been eager to point out that the primary text for God’s aseity, Exodus 3:14, does not bear the weight that is placed on it ... However, God’s independence from creation is at least implied ... demonstrating his eternal purpose and immutable nature.” None of these authors, of course, deny that God can be identified ontologically. The God who acts (the “economic” God) can never be separated from the God who is (the “immanent” God). See Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 166, “God’s holiness is said to be the very essence of his being (Is. 57:15, with further reference to Ex. 15:11, Is. 6:3, 40:25). But in this context the focus is upon the God who acts!”

³¹⁷ See the following smorgasbord of interpretations of the name JHWH, mostly in contexts to defend the doctrines of the simplicity and immutability of God, without paying enough attention to the context of Ex. 3:14. Dolezal, AG, 46-47, refers to JHWH as God’s “Self-sufficient Being” that transcends “the finite order of creaturely being.” It has at the least a telling “metaphysical” component as the “foundation for God’s covenantal reliability.” According to Baines, CIG, 48, 53, 91-95, 237, 270, 282-283, it conveys God’s “aseity,” “pure being,” “pure essence,” “pure actuality” (*actus* vs *potency*), “pure simplicity,” “absoluteness,” “self-existence,” “self-sufficiency,” “immutability;” and according to Renihan, GWP, 43, 147, “*Autousia*,” “Being,” “Essence,” “Eternity.” According to Long, 74-75, 79-80, 101, Aquinas adds an interesting wrinkle when he pairs Ex. 3:14 with John 14:6. “Together they (are said) to identify God’s nature and agency. One cannot be had without the other ... There is no distinction between God’s nature and action.” Simplicity does not and cannot allow this. This prompts him to conclude that it is undue criticism of Aquinas to claim that he shows little interest in God as an acting God. But be this as it may, it does not refute the fact that even if according to Aquinas Ex. 3:14 is not to be read apart from John 14:6, it is apparently John 14:6 which indicates that Ex. 3:14 refers to Divine agency, while, of course, Ex. 3:14 indicates that John 14:6 does not introduce temporality into this agency. The “I AM” that is mentioned in both passages “shows not only what God is but also what God does.” Since it spells simplicity, the latter does and must cover both bases. In a word, “the perfectly simple God helps us understand Triune agency and vice versa.” Beeke, RST, I, 550-553 (as well as 520, 627, 645, 664-665, 680, 689-690, 715, 748, 763) may well have presented the most comprehensive and purposefully balanced view. See for the place and use of Ex. 3:24 in the Reformers and Reformed orthodoxy, see Muller, PRRD, III, 233-238, 258-266.

use of Exodus 3:14 is (too) often used mainly (merely?) to undergird the Divine Being in its metaphysical attributes, such as simplicity, perfection, self-sufficiently, immutability, etc.³¹⁸

Further, the threefold *via* cannot be of much help either. For a starter it is never modeled in Scripture. There is not even a trace of it. This already should make us pause. Further, its origin is more than suspect. Candidly, it is necessitated by an Aristotelian/Plotinian Being-theology. Neither Aristotle's "godhead," "thinking of thinking," "Pure Form," "Absolute Universal," nor Plotinus's "Unconditioned Supreme," "Unknowable Source," "Nameless One," "Unfathomable *Buthos*," ever can or will "reveal" itself from the top down. This makes it indisputably mandatory to approach it from the bottom up. Enter the three *viae*. This should not only make us pause. It also should make us skeptical. Finally, each *via* essentially ends up in a dead-end street. It supposedly results in the adoration of mystery. But it comes with a price. It is unable to define any of God's perfections (in a child-like way). The *via causalitatis* does not define it. It simply informs us that the Being of God as the Creator-Cause is way superior to the creation-effect. The *via negationis* leaves us in the dark. God in his perfection is way past his creatures in their imperfection. The *via eminentiae* is no help either. God is way beyond his creatures conceptually. We are told that "we have no idea what it is to be love." In fact, we have no idea about anything pertaining to God. The price of the adoration of mystery that the threefold *via* requires us to pay is steep indeed, in fact, unconscionably steep. We can quote Scripture in the naming of God's perfections. But we cannot pinpoint what they mean, and this is by definition! On balance, in Thomistic scholasticism as well as all too frequently in Classic Reformed scholasticism in the Thomist tradition Aristotelian/Plotinian, "namelessness" appears to rule the day. Frankly, a perusal of the plethora of authors quoted in the *Reader*,³¹⁹ quickly reveals that none of them makes even an attempt to define the Divine perfection-terminology, whether it is love, grace, mercy, goodness, holiness, or any other perfection.³²⁰ In the *via*-context the incomprehensibility of God seems to swallow up his knowability, all protestations to the contrary. We are constantly told that the dissimilarities always outweigh the similarities by a country mile. So, where does this leave us? Well, whatever Scripture comes up with is only "analogical" at best. Again, whatever that means! All this should not just make us pause or skeptical. It should make us part company, decisively so. I recognize that any opposition to or rejection of the

³¹⁸ See a. o. Long, PSTG, 71-72, although 74-75 as well, where we are told that the *esse* ("be") of JHWH in the OT does not only refer to God's nature, but also to God's activity, similar to the "I Am's" of Jesus in the NT.

³¹⁹ Renihan, GWP, passim. See also Maastricht, TPT, II, 74-75, 213, 225. His take is that Israel's question, "what is his name," would convey "suspicious disbelief" or "fleshly curiosity." Moses' expressed concern, "what shall I answer?" would indicate that he himself has no hunch what God's essence "is all about!" God then spells out this imperceptible essence as "Being." This would denote his "eternity" as the ground for "the grateful celebration of God," with reference to Ps. 93:2; 102:12; 24, 26-27; 1 Chron. 16:36; 1 Tim. 1:17. I much rather see Israel's question as an honest one. What and how must we think about you? Is this possibly suggested by the 400 years of deafening silence? Moses would be nonplussed to answer this. God's answer, then, would hit the spot. My name, JHWH, is or entails a promise of "redemptive action" on your behalf. "You wait and see!" In fact, "You will not have to wait too long to see it!"

³²⁰ Listen to what John Owen says about love. Apparently based upon the three *viae* (Rennie, CIG, 67-80) he spells out the difference between God's love and man's love, as quoted in Rennie, CIG, 76, "The love of God is like himself, - equal, constant, not capable of augmentation or diminution; our love is like ourselves, - unequal, increasing, waning, growing, declining. His, like the sun, always the same in its light, though a cloud may sometimes interpose; ours, as the moon, has its enlargements and its straightenings." Rennie's conclusion, CIG, 76, "God's love is not only not unequal (should this not read "equal," instead of "unequal, to make this intelligible?") etc. (*via negationis*); it is infinitely greater than all we can conceive as love" (*via eminentiae*). If we cannot "conceive" of it, it clearly cannot be defined either! We simply must turn to this later!

“threefold *via*” and the “analogy” concept spawned by it is incomplete without spelling out an alternative that would do justice to Scripture. I aim to make a proposal in the concluding Section of this volume. Suffice it to say here that it is *not* by taking a beeline to “univocity.”

At any rate, all this gives lots of credence to the alarm bell type of protest, mentioned earlier, that the scholastics, whether Medieval or Reformed, at least to the extent that they are theo-ontological in their approach, are all too often like blind men groping either to penetrate the impenetrable secrets of God to whatever extent, or to make it intelligible to whatever degree (Deut. 29:29a). What adds to its credibility is the fact that none of these scholastics, as far I am aware, ever take time to spell out in a comprehensive fashion, let alone in all-encompassing and all-overriding details what God requires today’s Church to *do* as a matter of life and death (Deut. 29:29b). This is emphatically not to say that they overlook, ignore, or oppose the *praxis* required by theology. Far from it. Some of them go to great length to insist that *theologia speculativa* is not enough. It must be or turn into *theologia practica*. Nevertheless, it is to say that I have not read in any of them that the total theological enterprise must serve the purpose of Christ’s Grand Triple Command. Christ as the New Covenant Personified came to save, to donate his heart in our regeneration, to donate his righteousness in our justification and to donate his holiness in our sanctification. To donate this threefold salvation, with all that this entails, is the only reason why this world continues to exist! Christ as the Lion-Lamb (the King-Priest) turns it into a breeding ground of new Christians (Rev. 5:5-6a, 9). His Grand Command mandates that we as king-priests (lion-lambs; Rev. 5:10) turn this world into our fishing ground, gladly enlisted and greatly empowered to that end by the Spirit (Rev. 5:6b). So, stop “speculating,” and start acting! You will have your hands full when you do this.

Taste the urgency that is unmistakable in Christ’s Marching Order to his Army, just before his ascension. “Your Commanding General speaking. I am in sovereign control and I promise to accompany you and provide you with all the necessary logistics. Besides, I give you a weapon that is second to none, namely The Eternal Gospel embedded in the Eternal Word. So, go after the nations “with all you’ve got” to render them obedient (Rom. 1:5; 15:16; 16:26). To top it off, I will invest you with power through the Holy Spirit who will indwell you, so that torrents of life-giving water will pour forth from you. It will not be a cakewalk. I suffered and died to produce you. So, you suffer and die to produce others. But go to it! All hands better be on deck in perpetuity! And rejoice because an innumerable multitude will be your harvest! Always remember, though, that to be AWOL is not an option!”

All this is more than just hinted at in the Classic of Thomas a Kempis, “Blest is the simplicity that leaves the difficult way of dispute and goes forward on the level, firm path of God’s commandments. Many have lost devotion because they wished to search into things beyond them.”³²¹ I would not be at all surprised if with this (virtually damning?) assessment the 15th Century Thomas a Kempis targeted the 13th Century Aquinas and Scotus and the 14th Century Ockham who together by and large ruled the ecclesiastical and theological roost.

Frankly, taking theological refuge in Medieval scholasticism is fraught with danger. None of the Medieval icons have hunch of the New Covenantal Gospel in its two dimensions, the definitive dimension of a transplant of Christ’s heart in regeneration, Christ’s imputed righteousness in justification, and Christ’s imparted righteousness in sanctification,

³²¹ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 139.

symbolized in Baptism, and the progressive dimension in daily repentance and faith, daily forgiveness and daily holiness. So, they will not be able to be of any substantive help in aggressively advancing the all-embracing pursuit of Christ's Grand Command. In fact, they can only siphon off wasted time and energy to the extent that they are preoccupied in theontological attempts to make God's secrets intelligible to whatever extent. Method-scholasticism that avails itself of universal "logic and rhetoric" has a lot going for it. But substantive content-scholasticism that promotes pagan patterns of thoughts that are inimical to a Biblical truth, such as the archetype-ectype distinction, the concept of analogy, or the three *viae*, is in a different ballpark. The mill of the method is compromised when its users fill it with the grist of tainted content.³²²

Third, Christ's Grand Command immediately brings *Gospel* apologetics into the picture. Biblical Apologetics never addresses the mind with a view to agreement. It addresses the heart with a view to Gospel repentance, conjoined with Gospel faith, unto Gospel forgiveness and Gospel holiness (Acts 2:38). Only through the *triplex gratia* of the New Covenantal Gospel (Acts 2:38) and by means of the convicting Gospel presentation (Acts 2:37; 17:30-31) will it ever be possible for man to enter into the presence of God (John 3:3, 5), to experience the peace of God (Rom. 5:1) and to enjoy the fellowship with God (Hebr. 10:14).

None of this Full New Covenant Gospel is in evidence in Thomist scholasticism. Hence the utter need for the Reformation! But how about the practitioners of Reformed scholasticism? Clearly, *what* they seek to defend is the total gamut of Scriptural doctrines. This, of course, must have our unanimous sympathy and approval. But *how* they defend it is the issue at hand. The Aristotelian/Plotinian approach can only end up with the adoration of the mystery of "namelessness." There is little doubt that this contributed to a withering Church that soon dried up and had to clamor for the emergence of Pietism and Puritanism, however imperfect or perfect these movements may have been in their own rights.

In all candor, there is scant evidence of the threefold New Covenant Gospel at any time in Church History, inclusive of the Reformation era and beyond. Traditional Lutheranism basically emphasized a *simplex gratia* Gospel (justification). Traditional Calvinism adds a component and opts for a *duplex gratia* Gospel (justification and sanctification). The New Covenant insists on a *triplex gratia* Gospel (regeneration, justification, and sanctification).³²³

There is even less evidence that Protestant scholasticism was practiced with the avowed aim to galvanize the Church to the hot pursuit of Christ's Triple Command at any price and

³²² The thesis that there is more than meets the eye, that is, that Reformed Orthodoxy went beyond a merely resorting to a Medieval "method" scholasticism, appears to be justified by Muller himself when in PRRD, IV, 393, he asserts that "we must recognize the presence of Thomistic, Scotistic, nominalistic, and other patterns of Reformed orthodoxy based on streams of intellectual inheritance—whether via the Reformers or via the direct reappropriation of medieval tradition or via encounter with the Roman Catholic scholasticism of the late Renaissance." This points to a content-scholasticism that has the unmistakable imprint of the different and widely differing medieval scholastics upon them. I simply argue (in detail below) that the archetypal-ectypal distinction, the analogy concept, and the use of the three *viae* are three instances of this content impact!

³²³ The Reformed Tradition, inclusive of its hymnology, is literally awash with presentations, explanations, references, and defenses of the so-called *duplex gratia*, the grace of justification and sanctification. This is not the place critically to enlarge on this. But "twofold grace" is not and cannot be "saving grace." It is just as impossible to enter the Kingdom without regeneration (John 3:3, 5), as it is to enjoy the peace of the Kingdom without justification (Rom. 5:1) and to experience the fellowship of the Kingdom without sanctification (Hebr. 12:14). Only *threefold* grace (*triplex gratia*) is *saving* grace. I have a hunch that the systematic failure to treat regeneration with equal biblical emphasis may well be the reason why the various extant systems of apologetics do not target the heart. This is understandable in an Arminian kind of apologetics. But it may well be an indictment of a Reformed type when it overlooks or ignores this.

at any cost. Thus, it may well have helped pave the way to an essentially dead-end kind of street rather than to advance a God-glorifying Kingdom entering, experiencing, and enjoying vision and zeal. The presence of such vision and zeal was clearly what motivated Luther and Calvin to do battle with Medieval content-scholasticism, even if they continued at times to employ a method-scholasticism which was in regular use in the post-Reformation Orthodoxy to solidify the doctrinal stance of the Reformation.³²⁴ It took the stirrings of Pietism and Puritanism to put the train back on its biblical tracks, even if they were not perfect, similar, of course, to any other ecclesiastical movements.

Candidly, the term “Gospel Apologetics” may stand in need of additional explanation. It is “inspired” by the *locus classicus* of the Apologetic enterprise, 1 Peter 3:14. What Peter requires from us when “under attack,” goes well beyond what is widely known as Evidentialism, Presuppositionalism, or Neo-Presuppositionalism (Persuasionism). These do not go after the heart with a view to repentance, just as Peter (Acts 2:38) and Paul (Acts 17:20) did. They admittedly aim at an agreement of the mind, whether by means of facts and logic (pre-evangelistic Evidentialism), by means of the theory of facts and logic (non-evangelistic Presuppositionalism), or by means of an Aristotelian type of argumentation (non-evangelistic Neo-Presuppositionalism). The Apostle Peter, however, tells us to “give a reason of the hope within us.” This “hope” (of glory) is “Christ” (Col. 1:27)! “Christ alone (Col. 2:8)!” “On his cross he killed my rebel heart (Rom. 6:6) that resembles a ‘cobra’ (Ps. 58:4), he washed my filthy past (1 Pet. 1:19) that resembles ‘human dung’ (Phil. 3:8), and he eliminated my wicked life (Hebr. 10:10) that resembles ‘poison’ (Jam. 3:8). In his resurrection he replaced my ‘cobra’ with his heart in rebirth (1 Pet. 1:3) so that I can enter the Kingdom (John 3:5), my ‘dung’ with his righteousness in justification (2 Cor. 5:21) so that I have the peace of the Kingdom (Rom. 5:1) and my ‘poison’ with his holiness in sanctification (Hebr. 10:14) so that I have the fellowship of the Kingdom (Hebr. 12:14). With this Gospel-apologetics, resulting in a summons to call on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21) in heartfelt repentance (Acts 2:38), the Church should be off “to the races.” That Aquinas’ philosophico-theo-ontology has a definite apologetic thrust is a well-known fact.³²⁵ But there is no trace of any Gospel apologetics in any of his oeuvre. This should not come as a surprise! Roman Catholicism has no inkling of a Gospel heart transplant in biblical regeneration, of a Gospel imputed righteousness in biblical justification or of a Gospel imparted holiness in sanctification. Regrettably, there is no mention of Gospel apologetics in the volumes of his scholastic followers either.³²⁶ Since Christian apologetics serves the defense and the advance

³²⁴ Mostly due to the four impressive volumes of Muller’s PRRD (o. a. I, 15-16, 38, 45; IV, 382-391; 419-420) the “Calvinists *versus* Calvin” thesis which insisted on an extreme gap between Calvin and his later followers has been properly dismissed. They all embraced and advanced the same doctrinal edifice. They also openly availed themselves of the tool of Aristotelian (and Thomist) “logic and rhetoric” (PRRD, I, 40), especially after Beza introduced it into his training regimen. But, once more, the question may well arise whether there is more than just a grain of truth in it, in as much as the *content*-scholasticism of Calvin’s later orthodox followers was virtually absent in his voluminous writings. In short, the gap should not be overemphasized and overdone. But neither should it be virtually dismissed and underdone. The “change of pace” in Calvin is unmistakable. Not so incidentally, it has been argued that the introduction of Aristotelian “logic” by Beza in the Genevan Academy opened the door to a rationalistic type of scholasticism that tended to end up as a “Fremdkörper” (foreign element) in Reformation theology.

³²⁵ Long, 19. See also Fesko, RA, 204, who in this admittedly follows in the footsteps of Aquinas.

³²⁶ For one recent example, see Fesko, RA, 204, where he spells out three purposes of apologetics, as he sees it, (1) to refute intellectual objections to the Christian faith, (2) to clarify our understanding of the truth, and (3) to encourage and edify believers in their faith. Even if this triad should not be discounted, it does not come close to the Gospel apologetics practiced in Scripture. But more about this below.

of the Gospel (Phil. 1:7), the failure (or refusal) to spell it out in detail with a view to repentance and faith is passing strange!³²⁷

³²⁷ Personally, I think “the world” of the persons and the devoted sacrificial service of both Cornelius Van Til, who put Presuppositional Apologetics on the map, and R. C. Sproul, who espoused an influential Evidential Apologetics. But neither one even verbalized the content of the threefold New Covenant Gospel in their apologetic writings. Neither for that matter does Oliphint in championing his Neo-Presuppositional Persuasion Apologetics! To be sure in K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 155, 161, 171, he mentions that apologetics does not just restrict itself to “The Gospel.” So far, so OK, if not good! He further *quotes* Paul and his call to repentance (Acts 17:30). So far, so much better. But in K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 159, he goes on record that “our goal in a covenantal apologetic cannot be the conversion (hence repentance, *hk*) of those to whom we speak” The rationale? “That is a goal that we cannot accomplish.” We are told (read: restricted) to “communicate, (be it) as persuasively as possible, the truth of God.” Does this imply or suggest the aim of “mental agreement?” At any rate, to say the least, and, candidly, to put it mildly, this is incomprehensible in the light of Acts 2:38 and 17:30, both apologetic contexts. So, it is the better part of biblical wisdom to keep this kind of apologetics at arms’ length. We better remember the “winged words” of John Owen, that “we cannot expect to get repentance unless we preach repentance.” The same applies to counseling, evangelism, as well as apologetics. In Scripture even “persuasion” is unto repentance and faith (Acts 26:28) and, as we already saw, is not in the same ballpark as the Aristotle type of persuasion, which Oliphint champions! Incidentally, Fesko who with a good deal of justification strongly criticizes several essential components in the Van Til tradition and, therewith Oliphint as well (RA, 141ff), is at least in one way not much of an improvement upon the latter. No reference to repentance in his threefold goal of apologetics, (1) to refute intellectual objections to the Christian Faith, (2) to clarify our understanding of the truth, and (3) to encourage and edify believers in their faith (RA, 204). It is hard to miss Aquinas’ influence in all this. If we wish to follow in the apologetic footsteps of Peter (Acts 2:14ff, esp. 38) and Paul (Acts 17:16ff, esp. 30), we must decisively move beyond both Oliphint and Fesko.

VIII. A Provisional Assessment

To enlarge on all this some more, it is hard to overlook or ignore that again and again the fullness-of-ever-blessed-Trinitarian-life Doctrine of Divine Immutability as presented in Scripture was and is portrayed, if not assailed, as if it were identical to the empty and essentially deceitful Aristotelian/Plotinian concept. We may well ask the question, “what if the Church from its very inception would have forcefully and clearly declared that the two only had the “sound” in common, that the chasm between them could not have been greater, and that for its establishment or defense of the truly and uniquely Biblical Doctrine *only* Scriptural data would be tolerated?” Instead of turning ancient philosophers and their historical followers into bed-fellows, they would have recognized that they were all heading for perdition, including *the* philosopher and his ilk, and with a burden for their souls pleaded with them to repent of their suppression of the truth and to be reconciled to God, frankly, as matter of life and death! None of this is in evidence in Medieval and Classic Reformed Theology. At any rate, the failure to be solely biblical explains why every author who seeks to establish or defend this Doctrine on the basis of and with the tools of apostate Greek philosophy always must and usually do hasten to add that the God of Scripture is not immobile, etc., etc., but wonderfully alive, that philosophy is no more than a handmaiden that does not subtract from the clarity of Scripture but enhances it, etc., etc. Once they decide to be bed-fellows with Greek philosophers, their explaining “protest” is often met with a good deal of (deserved?) skepticism, if not usually ignored. In addition, they often make life difficult for their fellow Immutabilists who refuse to go the Greek philosophy route, and by default are painted with the same brush as their questionable fellow defenders.

Let us take a closer look at the use of the triad of univocity, equivocity, and analogy. Both theologians and apologists have made ample use of it without recognizing that it is an essential part of the theo-ontological tradition to establish the essence of what God has concealed as an evidence and display of his glory (Prov. 25:2; see also Is. 42:8). The use of this triad gives the mistaken impression that the incomprehensible can be properly situated, if not comprehended at least to a certain extent. Hence this use is part and parcel of the *hubris* to penetrate the impenetrable, and of the refusal to honor the God-given boundaries whether consciously and intentionally or not. Remember the earlier mentioned “lone voice!”

Furthermore, the “analogy” notion in the present context is admittedly rather murky and basically does not tell us anything. As mentioned already, we are routinely informed that it does not spell either “identity” (univocity) or “difference” (equivocity), but supposedly “difference in identity.” Candidly, this “triad” functions quite well on the created level and can be very helpful when all the “entities” involved are known.³²⁸ But when (since?) one of the poles in complementary truth is incomprehensible, neither the “identity” nor the

³²⁸ By way of example: (1) Take a look at my arms (body parts), they are both tanned by the sun (univocity). (2) I strap two arms (revolvers) on the upper part of my arms (body parts) under my coat to remove them from sight (equivocity). (3) You cannot escape the long arm (jurisdictional reach) of the law (analogy). In each instance of this “triad” the terms in question are clearly definable.

“difference” can be spelled out. So, we are left in a definition fog. It is the kind of dead-end street that can be expected as the end result of apostate thinking, whether in substance or method and is therefore no more than “a mental gimmick” that basically pulls the wool over the eyes of the unsuspecting. As we shall see below as well, it is a left-handed way to state or situate “essentially” what is not “statable” or “situatable” with the “ethical” the inevitable loser, if not victim, whether in focal time, energy, activity or otherwise.

But, finally, there is a third issue which may well be the weightiest one. The appeal to “analogy” puts an unwarranted onus on the text of Scripture. It conveys that the “realities,” either expressed in the text or to which the text refers, “really” transcend what the language of the text indicates, that is, rise above the plain grammatical-historical meaning of the text. This differs sharply from incomprehensibility. Incomprehensibility conveys that there are mysteries that no language can touch. It spells inability. Analogy conveys that somehow the language of the text falls short of expressing what it seeks to express. It spells inadequacy. Language is not just *limited* in its scope (incomprehensibility). It is *deficient* in its nature (analogy).³²⁹ This unacceptably downgrades the language of the text, compromises the message of the text, endangers the impact of the text and jeopardizes the obedience to the text, all vehement or mild protestations to the contrary. At bottom in this type of reasoning God does not come with mysteries, he *is* a mystery, with analogy thrown in to salvage him from pure equivocity. To prevent the downgrade of Biblical language from happening was the burden of both Albert Martin and Austin Phelps. At any rate, to insist in one’s protesting response that, all things considering and despite everything, “analogical” language (still) conveys truth is essentially a hollow statement, however well-meaning it may be, seem or sound.³³⁰ After all, it defies definition. Or it is to ignore in practice what is conveyed in theory!

³²⁹ Similarly, Frame, ST, 703, correctly avers that God’s incomprehensibility does not “disqualifies” the knowledge of God but refers to the “limitation” of that knowledge! The veracity of this knowledge is not in question. Just look at its results, the results of its absence (Hos. 4:6) and its presence (John 17:3). However, it is nether “full” nor “exhaustive.” We may not “pry” beyond this incomprehensible complementarity. To do so in terms of the analogy concept is dangerous. It is essentially inimical to the veracity of this knowledge. Hence Frame’s understandable unease with it.

³³⁰ The Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til is high on the notion of “analogy.” Taking his starting point in the absolute metaphysical distinction between the being of God and the being of his creation, he concludes that there must be an absolute metaphysical distinction between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of creature man as well, “by good and necessary consequence.” On that basis he argues that these two types of knowledge, although they may have the point of reference in common, “do not coincide at any given point.” This is “contrastive” view with a vengeance. But to rescue meaningful communication, he posits that the knowledge of man, while neither univocal nor equivocal to the knowledge of God, is “analogical” to it and hence true as far as it goes. Gordon Clark argues that the predicate of “analogy” in this context does and must lead to skepticism. Since “equivocity” would radically and totally destroy the possibility of any communication whatsoever, he puts his eggs in the basket of “univocity.” Even John Frame, although a pupil of Van Til, recognizes the murky waters of the “analogy” concept and does not rule out all univocity out (See, Dolezal, AG, 72). At any rate, the resultant ecclesiastical turmoil is a matter of historical record. Frankly, and from my vantage point, both men of undoubted stature suffered of the theo-ontological malady and ventured into the forbidden territory which God reserves for himself and where angels do, and humans should fear and refuse to tread. Both should have shunned the triad of univocity, equivocity, and analogy, and followed the pattern of Chalcedon. While in the footsteps of Scripture it fully, reverently and positively honored the harmonious union of the divine and human nature in the one Person of Christ following the incarnation, it equally and deeply honored the mystery of the relationship of the two natures by issuing the four negatives, “without confusion,” “without change” (versus Eutychus), “without ‘division,’” “without separation” (versus Nestorius). The radical Chalcedon refusal in the utter turmoil of the Christological controversy to be theo-ontological has been hailed as a veritable miracle, if not the greatest miracle of Church History. Both Van Til and Clark would have done well, if in its footsteps they had “simply”

In that case fully to subscribe to “analogical” language and also heartily to endorse and confess that this language is unshakably truthful and totally dependable, is ironically as well as gratefully a house divided by itself, in which hopefully essential “arrogance” is permanently neutralized by childlike humility and worshipful obedience. The latter is the burden of Bavinck and even more so of Beeke.³³¹

The bottom line is this. A truly and fully Scriptural theology does not need theo-ontological “constructs” in order respectfully and obediently to profess the complementarity of Scriptural truth, the “mysterious” essence of which cannot be grasped by the human

confessed both the fully incomprehensible transcendence and the truthfully knowable immanence of God, left it at that, put *all* their eggs, not just “occasionally,” but without interruption in white-hot pursuit of Christ’s Triple Command and urged their adherents and sympathizers to follow suit, with the unceasing prayer that the total Church would have the hallmark of this Command indelibly stamped upon it as both the only twofold thing needful and its magnificent hands-on obsession! In fact, they would have paved the way to a Copernican Revolution, if shoulder to shoulder and in a child-like fashion (Ps. 131:1-2) they would have unmistakably adorned their confession in a truly Chalcedonian (and child-like) fashion with the epithets of “without univocity,” so as not to eclipse or compromise God’s unquestioned incomprehensibility and “without equivocity,” so as not to eclipse or compromise his unquestioned knowability without further probing. It would have squarely put Deut. 29:29 center stage, and in the process prevented much ecclesiastical turmoil and lots of personal heartache, not to speak of a huge waste of time and energy by them as well as their followers. They should have been used worshipfully and radically to pursue Christ’s Grand Threefold Command (Mt. 28:19-20) which was meant not only to encompass the length and breadth of life but also to be bigger than life (John 12:24). See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 21-40, on the Van Til-Clark controversy. He basically contends that Van Til unacceptably tilted to Divine transcendence through the absolute Creator-creature distinction at the expense of Divine immanence by emphasizing the radical ontological as well as epistemological discontinuity between God and his creation, while Clark took the reverse tack by insisting on the epistemological continuity in his rational Self-disclosure. Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2005) weighs in on all this as well. So does Douglas J. Douma, *The Presbyterian Philosopher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 107-164). To me the bottom line is both deep and grave. Van Til basically started out from a “contrastive” view in the Creator-creature distinction. This is indisputable from his statement that “the knowledge of God and man does not coincide at any point.” “Analogy” had to come to the rescue to offset this. Clark fought this type of “equivocity,” correctly so. But instead of criticizing the underlying “contrastive” view and insisting on the hearty child-like embrace of the incomprehensible nature of both complementary truths, he chose his own way to bridge the perceived gap with the concept of univocity. Once the positions of these two men were set in concrete, the rift became irremediable. Clark could not accept the analogy solution. It would lead to skepticism. Writes Clark, as quoted in *The Presbyterian Philosopher*, 266, “The question is, can we know God? If answer be made in terms of negation and analogy alone; if all possibility of God’s knowledge and man’s coinciding at any point be denied; if no sentence in the Bible can possibly have the same meaning for man that it has for God; the logical result is a skepticism that makes revelation impossible and Christianity a vain dream. But if man can know some things that God knows; if man can grasp some of God’s meaning; if God’s knowledge and man’s have some points in common, then true religion is no delusion, but a glorious reality.” On the other hand, Van Til could not accept “univocity.” It would relativize the version of his beloved Creator-creature distinction, and so domesticate, if not humanize God. In the end neither one proved to be “child-like” in the Chalcedonian tradition. The immediate ecclesiastical fall-out was as unbiblically inevitable as it was tragic in its nature and consequences. That they personally “made up” in the end was a “consolation,” but only of sorts. The controversy itself never saw resolution and therefore never went away.

³³¹ For their occasional use of “analogy,” see both Bavinck, RD, II, 48, 110, 134, and Beeke, RST, I, 72, 303, 534-536, 632, 715, 723-725, 939. With this concept he mostly seeks to convey, non-technically, that we cannot “catch” God in our language and knowledge, even if these are fully true. In short, RST, I, 724-725, our knowledge and language are and remain “child-like,” resembling “a spark compared to the sun,” with further reference to John Owen. So far, so good, if not excellent. But when he advocates, RST, 535, that “we must constantly transpose earthly concepts into the higher key of the divine nature,” he loses me and should lose everybody else. We earthlings never could, never can, and never will succeed in this. It is “an invitation to a theo-ontology” that we (politely) *must* decline. It is both impenetrable and forbidden territory.

mind.³³² At any rate, it should now be crystal clear that for scholasticism, whether of the Medieval or Orthodox Reformed variety, to take refuge in the threefold *via* or in the analogy concept is to “man” the Trojan Horse of apostate thinking.³³³

At any rate, the bottom line is also quite simple. (1) Mankind with its finite mind cannot overcome or undo what appears contradictory to it. But God transcends the finite mind and posits perfect harmony, such as, light as both a particle and a wave that everyone recognizes as such, even if it is baffling. (2) Mankind cannot fabricate an entity that is “one in essence and three in persons.” But God is such “entity” and for that very reason towers above man as incomprehensible. (3) Mankind cannot sovereignly plan and control every existing being and everything that comes to pass and hold these beings responsible. But God can and does all this and is incomprehensible in the process. Anyone who bristles against these truths has a deep-seated theo-ontological problem, thinks too highly of himself, and at best ends up worshipping a God who is simply too small! So, anyone who is not content to lodge all these truths in his heart with cognitive, volitional, and emotive tranquility and peace in its wake, but seeks mentally even to “sniffle” at God’s incomprehensibility “secrets” goes a bridge, if not bridges too far, and did, does, or will pay the steep price of defeat, whatever, however, wherever, or whenever. The hot pursuit of biblical ethics will be one of the victims.

As has been mentioned already, this questionable “bridge too far” was identified as such in the theological philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.³³⁴ Therefore, it was met, together with the theology of Barth, with a supreme challenge. “To construe God” with the *analogia entis* (Aquinas) or the *analogia historiae* (Barth) is to venture into the secret things of God and to saddle oneself and one’s often unsuspecting followers with an unconscionably high toll. To spell out this challenge once more, “The biblical worship of the known (immanent) God who in his condescendence has truthfully and amply revealed himself, but unapologetically reserves his secrets for himself in his (transcendent) incomprehensibility simply goes by the

³³² Dolezal, AG, 67, 72, records that Ronald Nash is weary of the “analogy” concept and that John Frame avers that at times our language about God is (indeed) “univocal or literal.” My eventual plea is “simply” that theology moves beyond the “triad” of univocity-equivocity-analogy altogether. Otherwise one could be or feel forced to conclude that folks who are uneasy with the “analogy” concept necessarily become bedfellows of either univocity or equivocity. In fact, even folks who are properly suspicious and weary of “analogy” seem to believe that there is no other option. I contest this. Folks who are “tyrannized” by this “triad” are basically theo-ontologists. The only way to escape this trap is to follow the biblical model in its use of language. But for more about this model, which honors the complementarity of truth, see below. It is sufficient to state for now, as a sort of preview, that the rejection of the concept of analogy, reflecting, if not in obedience to the biblical model, does not force anyone to become bed-fellows with either univocity or equivocity! The biblical model transcends this “triad!”

³³³ I am far from the first Immutabilist who takes exception to the analogy concept. Muller, PRRD, I, 65, underscores that “the Thomistic line of thought continues into the Reformation—for example in the writings of Vermigli, Zanchi, and, to a certain extent, Keckerman.” But he also goes on record that this line of thought “is modified by a more negative assessment of the powers of reason and by a sense of diastasis between the ways of God and the ways of man that virtually cancels a Thomistic use of the *analogia entis* in theology,” with reference to one of his own publications, Richard A. Muller “*After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133-136. Apparently, the contrastive view, evident in Aquinas, has raised eyebrows even during the heyday of Post-Reformation orthodoxy, as it should have!

³³⁴ To obtain a detailed grasp of the intricacies of the analogy concept and its relationship to both univocity and equivocity, especially in Aquinas, see Hans Dieter Betz, Don Browning, Bernd Janowski, Eberhard Jungel, eds., *Religion, Past & Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), I, 203-205; Robert Sweetman, “Univocity, Analogy and the Mystery of Being according to John Duns Scotus,” in James K. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 73-87; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112-132.

board. But Karl Barth, as well as Aquinas, did in this regard “*transgress the boundary of the worship worthiness of God, and has - the admitted mortal man in his own estimation - penetrated into the essence of God*”³³⁵

It goes without saying that all this as “an intentionally spine-chilling and purposefully definitive conclusion” about the use of the notion of “analogy,” whether of “being” (*analogia entis*) or of “history” (*analogia historiae*; that is, of *Geschichte* in the German language), even if only minimally correct, cannot but require a Job-like repentance in sackcloth and ashes, not only on the part of these two admitted “icons,” but also on the part of their followers, if they wish to experience the very worship of God, also, if not precisely in his incomprehensibility, that is required by him (Job 42:6). Once again, it is *hubris* not to embrace the *foundational* incomprehensible complementarity of truth in full child-like contentment, whether consciously and intentionally or not, and then to proceed with plumbing God’s essence, beyond what God has revealed about himself in his Word. In this regard both Aquinas and Barth are “hostile brothers” (*feindliche Bruder*). For all practical purposes both overlook or ignore Psalm 131:1-2 as well as Job 42:1-6, and therewith essentially destroy the foundation of all theologizing. That this has calamitous consequences is a biblical no-brainer (Ps. 11:3). Besides, the purpose of his Self-disclosure is solely and worshipfully to pursue “ethics,” in the widest possible sense (Deut. 29:29). There is no doubt that this was, is, and will be compromised to the extent that the pursuit of *theo-ontology* prevails. To underscore once more, even the God-fearing and most righteous Job (Job 1:1) had to get to know God in his incomprehensibility and hiddenness to see him for whom he truly and fully was (Job 42:5) and had to learn not ever to penetrate his *Inner Sanctum* (Job 42:3; Ps. 131:1), but rather to be most satisfied in him and with him like a weaned child (Job 42:4; Ps. 131:2). So, should we, if we wish to have the biblical foundation in place on which everything can and must be built for it to be proper and lasting.³³⁶

To wake folks up to the utter necessity not to take forays into “the secret things of God” was also, as already mentioned, the near “magnificent obsession” of an author’s extensive seven-volume set of observations, remarks, and comments that cover his conceptual philosophy, his visionary outlook and his active stance of life.³³⁷ He virtually wages war against any and all types of *theo-ontologies* that cut across the God-imposed boundary into what always should be honored as both a forbidden and inaccessible “no-man’s land.” It seems that every theology runs the risk to be overcome by the fascination to enter God’s hidden essence rather than into his revealed ethics. The all too busy pursuit of the former must, by definition, lead to the all too dangerous neglect of the latter.

³³⁵ Dr. S. U. Zuidema, *Confrontatie met Karl Barth* (Engl. Tr., *Confrontation with Karl Barth*) (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1963), 199-200. Millard J. Erickson, “God and Change,” in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1 / 2 (1997), 51, perceptively shows that the pot calls the kettle black when a critical stance against Greek philosophical underpinnings is rooted in an alternate, equally unacceptable, philosophical footing. In a word, In the case of Barth, his Kantian theology is no net gain over Aquinas’ Aristotelian one. This is clearly what Zuidema seeks to point out.

³³⁶ That this has serious implications for “the massive theological edifices” construed by both Aquinas and Barth stands to sanctified reason. To the extent that their “products” miss the biblical foundation and are built on the wrong one, they must be discarded. This is even more consequential in Barth than to Aquinas. By dismissing the inerrancy of Scripture out of hand Barth has nothing left to keep him in check. His basic Kantianism governs the totality of his Dogmatic Theology. Aquinas, at least, confesses that Scripture is the Word of God, even if he holds that it stands in need of the ecclesiastical *imprimatur*. He is willing on that basis to deviate from Aristotle and dismiss him on crucial issues.

³³⁷ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, I-VII.

As we saw, Bavinck as well as Beeke-Smalley make occasional use of this triad as well,³³⁸ but really do not need it to make their case for the simultaneity of God's immutable transcendence and covenantal immanence. Candidly, their properly basic and very copious use of Scripture, which is and should be the sole authority to establish anything, is more than sufficient to do so.

Let us also take a quick look at a train of thought that by and large must receive our stamp of approval, but still discloses a trace of the apostate theo-ontological tradition. When authors inform us that in the treatment of the complementarity of Divine Transcendence and Immanence we are "walking a tightrope"³³⁹ something is lacking. It is the *expressed* reality of radical and total "cognitive, volitional and emotional rest." Failure to arrive at this is inevitable so long as one operates on the level of the mind (as well as will or emotions) that is either driven by an admitted contrastive view or overtaken by a hidden and unrecognized one. Cognitive (as well as volitional and emotional) rest is only achievable when complementary truth consciously, intentionally, and openly does or is made to lodge in the regenerate heart with its double occupancy. At that moment, all tension radically and totally vanishes and one can and does dispense with all possible "tightropes."³⁴⁰ What emerges is a serene mental, volitional, and emotional satisfaction that results in unfettered worship and heartfelt obedience.

Let us, finally, take a longer look at what may well be questionable at points in an otherwise well-written, well-researched, detailed and prominent volume that puts up a veritable and admirable "fight" for God's immutability.³⁴¹ This perfection (attribute), we are told, excludes "an anterior or a subsequent state of being,"³⁴² and does not entail that "God cannot create or bring about temporal effects without ontologically participating in the temporality, mutability and make-up of his creation."³⁴³ In other words, God does not need to turn into a temporal, mutable and composite agent" to communicate in a "temporal landscape" with "temporal changelings" or to effect "temporal change" unto "temporal objectives." So far, so good, if not excellent.

But then it turns around and insists that God's simplicity *requires* that all his attributes are essentially identical. To confess with the Church of all ages that God is not a composite of parts requires the admission that his essence is not the sum-total, "the *summative set* of particular, distinct properties or attributes that collectively comprises this essence."³⁴⁴ This would throw out the parts through the front door but bring them back in through the back door. No, an uncompromised embrace of the Biblical doctrine of the *simplicitas Dei* requires the *identity* of the Divine Perfections as the only antidote that can keep the mutability of God as well as the Mutabilists at bay.³⁴⁵ Parenthetically, it should not be too difficult to recognize

³³⁸ In Bavinck, RD, II, 48, 110, 134; and Beeke, RST, I, 72, 303, 534-536, 632, 715, 723-725, 939, respectively.

³³⁹ Beeke, RST, 865.

³⁴⁰ Frame, ST, 45, correctly assesses that non-biblical views, in this context the non-biblical view of Divine transcendence in relation to Divine immanence, are full of tension! Biblical views are always without tension.

³⁴¹ James E. Dolezal, *All that is in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books) (AG).

³⁴² Dolezal, AG, 88.

³⁴³ Dolezal, AG, 96.

³⁴⁴ Dolezal, AG, 74.

³⁴⁵ James E. Dolezal, *All that is in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books), xiii-xiv, 38-39, 52, 57-58, 135-137. Dolezal, 38, calls the doctrine of Divine simplicity "the theological grammar" that does and should control all proposals regarding "theology proper," and, 52, "the controlling centerpiece of classical Christian grammar,

an underlying, be it hidden contrastive view. It takes a Doctrine, and the arduous argument to set it in concrete at that, to keep mutability from invading the territory of its immutability counterpart. Why not simply and cheerfully refer to the Biblical “Say-So?” Apart from everything else, this would locate a possible fight where it belongs. What precisely *is* the Biblical ‘Say-So?’ I am somewhat leery when I am told, as we saw, that it takes philosophical reasoning “to explain and understand” a doctrine. Should not exegetical reasoning carry the day?

But be this what it may, what about the unmistakable Biblical language that presents us with the apparent *diversity* of the Divine perfections? The volume in question seeks to explain this as follows, “God’s perfection in his undivided essence is shown forth in a vast array of creaturely perfections ... the simple unity in God is presented to the human knower in the form of creaturely multiplicity. But this refraction of His simple glory into so many beams of finite perfection does not mean these multifarious beams speak no truth about his simple nature. They just do not speak that truth under the incomprehensible simple form of that nature” ... “The only creaturely language to express the simple God is a complex language since the only language that can be used by us to refer to God is drawn from the world of finite complex beings. It is under the form of the finite that God reveals his infinite perfections. The diversity of divine attributes lies, then, on the side of God’s *revelation* to creatures, not in the being of God Himself ... God’s attributes are one most pure essence diversely apprehended of us, as it is diversely manifested to us. The mistake of those who insist upon a complex divine essence is in expecting human language and thought to parallel the very form of God’s being”³⁴⁶ and to disclose “the manner of God’s existence in a comprehensible one-to-one fashion.”³⁴⁷ In a word, the confession of the simplicity of God’s essence and the insistence to define this essence as a composition or aggregation of attributes are mutually exclusive.³⁴⁸ The embrace of the latter opens the way to “the erosion of the absoluteness of God,” jeopardizes “the infinite and unsurpassable glory of His being,”³⁴⁹ and, last but not least removes the definitive barrier to the introduction of Divine temporality and Divine mutability, both of which are anathema to Scripture.

All this is straightforward, plain as the day, and not devoid of an attractive ingenuity. I get back to the adjective “attractive” below. But for now, the careful and sensitive question may well (must?) be asked whether this also might go a “theo-ontological bridge too far.” However, before I try to answer this question it is advisable to take a closer look at the general “lay of the land” pertaining to all this.

shaping even the articulation of the Trinity.” It sanctions all “good” proposals and judges all the “bad” ones, naturally to keep the latter out. Besides, it safeguards the “absolute incomprehensibility of God throughout its entire formulation,” and “preserves the integrity of the revealed mystery of God at precisely the points where human reason may be tempted to diminish it in an effort to make God more easily understood by the human intellect.” It should not come as a surprise that I much applaud the last statement. It paves the way for a fruitful discussion “what” and “who” does or may go a bridge too far, a discussion that weighs all arguments carefully in order always to honor Deut. 29:29a! See also Bavinck, RD, II, 127, where Divine “simplicity” is said to “speak of God as the absolute fullness of life.”

³⁴⁶ Dolezal, AG, 76-78; see also AG, 99-100.

³⁴⁷ Dolezal, AG, 75

³⁴⁸ Dolezal, AG, 75.

³⁴⁹ Dolezal, AG, 78.ome

Spotlight XII

The Attributes of God

Dolezal, AG, 78, is, indeed, straightforward. He leaves no doubt about his stance and is adamant in his defense of both the *simplicitas Dei* in general and the *synonymity* of all his perfections as identical in the *essentia Dei* in particular.³⁵⁰ To him the attribute-identity in God is not negotiable. It “upholds the absoluteness of God’s being.” To question it is tantamount to eroding this absoluteness! He argues that for Post-Reformation orthodoxy (1) God’s attributes are his essence and (2) that in this essence his attributes are identical and synonymous. There is, indeed, total unanimity about the former. But it seems that historically the latter seems more nuanced. So, let us look at this.

Dolezal, AG, 74, quotes icons, such as John Owen and George Swinnock to bolster his assessment. Writes Owen, “The attributes of God which alone seem to be distinct in the essence of God, are all of them essentially the same with one another, and everyone the same with the essence of God itself.” Adds Swinnock, “His justice is his mercy, and his wisdom is his patience, and his knowledge is his faithfulness, and his mercy is his justice etc. Though they are distinguished in regard to objects, and in regards of our apprehension of them, and in regard to their effects, yet they are all one in themselves, and this flows from the former head, because they are the essence of God and his essence is a pure undivided being.” Comments Dolezal, “This attribute-identity version of simplicity appears to have been the Reformed consensus in the seventeenth century” with further reference to William Twisse, the first Moderator of the Westminster Assembly, “That God’s attributes are not really distinguished we all confess,” and Turretin, “The attributes cannot really differ from his essence or from one another (as one thing from another) because God is most simple and perfect. Now a real distinction presupposes things diverse in essence which the highest simplicity rejects” (Turretin, EIT, I, iii, 5,7). All this elicits two observations. First, the attribute-identity is not derived from explicit biblical data. It is the product of “the good and necessary consequence rule.” Second, in his wording Dolezal seems somewhat hesitant about his thesis. So, let us take a further look, this time in Mastricht, to see whether he can help is along. Frankly, he is very enlightening in his exposition on the *simplicitas Dei*, to say the least.

In TPT, 116, he asserts that God makes his essence known to us through his attributes. On the one hand, they are God’s essence, identical to his one infinite perfection. On the one hand, since this essence is unknowable to our intellect through its native finitude and its imperfection, we can only come up with a “hodge-podge” (*ipse dixit*) of concepts. We attribute to God some positive concepts that we derive from what we see on a creaturely level and remove all negative concepts from him. Even at that, we also remove all remaining imperfections from what we positively attribute to God (*via negationis*) and add to it “the infinite preeminence that belongs to him by reason of the infinity of his essence (*via eminentiae*).” [This said, in TPT, 117, he adds as foundational that “all the attributes together in God are nothing but one certain most simple and most pure act, his very essence, and his infinite perfection.” He concludes, in TPT, 117-119, with several inferences. 1. “The attributes of God differ among themselves, but not so much on God’s part as on the part of our conception.” Still, “from the likeness and identity of the effect” they must be “attributed to God” and be “distinguished in God, at least virtually and eminently.” 2. “All the attributes truly belong to God, more properly and perfectly than they belong to the creatures ... in so far as the perfection of any divine attribute infinitely exceeds any analogous perfections in the creatures. Although at the same time, the names by which those perfections are designated belong first of all to the creatures, in as much as they are transferred from them to God.” 3. Since all the attributes speak of one most simple act in God, intrinsically they do not admit to any increase, loss, dissimilarity, or inequality. Extrinsically, however, one attribute can extend itself to more objects than another, in which sense the intellect can be called greater than the will, or it acts more intensely upon one object than upon another, in which sense God loves the elect more than the reprobate.” 4. There is no conflict or enmity among the attributes of God. If there seems such thing, for example between mercy and avenging justice, it is entirely in the object according to which the uniform perfection of God, since it is infinite, is occupied in different ways.” “Or, as one might say more accurately, it is this (uniform) perfection of God, which the creatures undergo in different ways.” 5. Great care must be taken to use the three *viae*, *causalitatis*, *negationis* and *eminentiae* to

Commented [HK5]:

³⁵⁰ Dolezal, AG, 42, 56-57, 74, 80.

investigate the divine attributes. 6. The attributes belong to God not just “virtually, a heat belongs the sun,” nor just “eminently, just as the perfection of a thing caused belongs to its cause,” but “formally, in so far as every perfection which is designated through analogous attributes, with every attached imperfection removed, belongs to God truly and properly, and indeed to a preeminent degree, although they do not belong to him as accidents or qualities, which pertains to the imperfections of those attributes in the creatures.” 7. Not a trace of the incommunicable attributes, whether the negative ones, such as infinity or independence, or the positive ones, such as omniscience or omnipotence, can ever be discovered in any creature. 8. With regards to the communicable attributes the correspondence between God and his creatures is never univocal, since there is no proportion between the infinite and the finite, nor equivocal since from the knowledge of the one we can be led back to the knowledge of the other. So, we are left with analogical correspondence. The thing signified by the attributes belongs principally and originally to God, but only participatively and with a degree of diminution to the creatures only, just as health belongs to an animal, although on account of the animal also to food and medicine. This takes us, in TPT, 120, 122-123, 125, to Mastricht’s conclusions. 1. “Attributes are infinite in God, from which the finite is infinitely distant. The attributes belong to God truly and substantially, eminently, and analogically, to such a degree that although a perfection signified by the attributes, which belongs to the creatures, belongs as such to God, nevertheless the perfection of this attribute is not, vice versa, to the extent that it is present in God, also present in the creatures, except perhaps by some sort of vestige of it.” 2. Although the Reformed admit that God’s essence differs from his attributes in abstract terms, they differ not really in God himself or among themselves. God as pure Deity and as absolute first being, that is without composition, requires this. 3. Attributes, such as mercy and avenging justice are not “contrary” in God, but in his work. We observe this type of “contrariety in the divine effects and form from it such attributes.” “It is the chief perfection of the most simple divine essence that in things that are different it can produce things that are contrary.” 4. On balance the analogical diminution that comes with the Creator-creature relationship is such that in creature man we cannot observe much more than “some vestiges” of the original.

This lengthy summary serves a significant purpose. When Mastricht starts “from the top,” from the simplicity of God as “Pure Deity,” “Absolute First Being,” he does and must “by good and necessary consequence” come to the unavoidable conclusion of the essential *ad intra* attribute-identity and attribute-synonymity. Dolezal clearly takes this tack. But when starts “from the bottom” with the three *viae*, he does and must come to the equally unavoidable conclusion that the attributes are distinct in the essence of God, each has its own anchorage in God, caused by God (*via causalitatis*), shorn of all imperfections (*via negationis*), and in a preeminent manner (*via eminentiae*). In short, Mastricht develops two strands that basically contradict each other. Muller, III, 44, quite perceptively calls our attention to the same bifurcation, “The distinction of the attributes is not in God himself (simplicity!) but in God’s works *ad extra*. Nonetheless, given that these attributes are evident to us by way of causality, they are not merely names or terms applied by us to God but are in fact proper designations of the divine substance.” He comes back to this in PRRD, III, 297, “Most probably (!) the reason that a series of definitions affirming the way in which positive distinctions can be made does not always appear in the doctrine of divine simplicity is that the doctrine belongs to the *via negativa* and is designed that God is non-composite—whereas the distinctions appear along the lines of the *via eminentiae*, as indicated by the language of distinctions itself (i.e., *per eminentiam*, and *eminenter*).” From my perspective this bifurcation must be traced back to a deeper, underlying root. It is the typical outcome when the fundamental dialectic governs the thinking process. Universality impinges upon particularity or drives it out and vice versa. Parmenides sought to drive out particularity and Postmodernism universality. The Stoics toned particularity down and the Epicureans universality. The alternative is to seek a synthesis or simply to juxta-posit them without throwing up one’s hands. Ancient and Modern philosophy by and large sought to synthesize them. Chaos Science juxta-posit them.³⁵¹ All this results from the failure or refusal to embrace the incomprehensible complementarity of truth.

When theology is (philosophically) infested, whether it is recognized or not, it is bound to show similar traits. With regards to God’s simplicity, it appears that Dolezal goes the universality route, drives particularity out, and concludes to attribute-identity. Wolterstorff takes the opposite route, dismisses universality, and ends up debunking simplicity and all that accompanies this, aseity, immutability, etc., etc. Mastricht, as we saw juxta-posed them. But basically, he resembles a questionable “Chunnel” builder. He constructed his theology both from the top down and from the bottom up and may not even have noticed that the two segments did not match in the middle. At whatever side “the traffic” commences, it cannot reach the other side. Only a heart’s

³⁵¹ James Gleick, *Chaos* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); Nina Hall, ed., *Exploring Chaos* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

commitment to the incomprehensible complementarity of truth can enjoy perfect peace and rest in the face of it. Frankly, I am not sure whether this would be in Muller's purview. However, for one thing, once the reality and the nature of "complementarity:" is recognized and embraced, all efforts to synthesize the non-synthesizable will immediately cease.

Candidly, I cannot but conclude that a similar scenario is in evidence in Aurelius Augustine in the early Church and in Herman Bavinck in the more recent Church.

On the one hand, as Bavinck observes, in Augustine "every attribute is identical with God's essence and to that extent with every other attribute as well."³⁵² Let us listen to Augustine himself, "For God to be is the same as to be strong or to be just or to be wise, or whatever is said of that simple multiplicity, or manifold simplicity, whereby to signify his substance," and "That which is justice is also itself goodness, and that which is goodness is also itself blessedness. His greatness is the same as his wisdom ... and his goodness is the same as his wisdom ... with respect to him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great or wise, or true or to be good, or in general to be himself."³⁵³

However, one the other hand, as Bavinck also observes, "all these predicates are rightfully and truly used of God. God is all that he has ... In speaking of the simplicity of God it is not Augustine's intent to take anything away from God but, on the contrary, to conceive of God in the fullness of his being. With this in view he speaks in two contexts of the 'simple multiplicity' or the 'manifold simplicity' present in God and calls God's wisdom 'simply manifold and uniformly multiform.'"³⁵⁴ Let us once again listen to Augustine himself, "His wisdom is multiple in its simplicity and multiform in uniformity. It comprehends all incomprehensible things with such incomprehensible comprehensions that if he wished always to create new things of every possible kind, each of them unlike his predecessors, none of them could be for him undesigned and unforeseen; nor would it be that he foresaw each just before it came into being. God's wisdom would contain each and all of them in his eternal prescience."³⁵⁵ In short, face to face with the mystery of God as God, he starts with "simplicity," continues with "manifoldness" and "multiformity," and concludes with "simple manifoldness/multiplicity" and "multiform/manifold simplicity" (For this see also, Muller, PRRD, III, 42).

This "enigmatic" combination on Augustine's part, which Bavinck adopts as well, if not endorses, can be interpreted in more than one way. He either turns into "a house divided against itself." In that case the attributes are *both* said to be identical *and* to reflect a "uniform multiformity." Or he simply juxta-poses them, without necessarily recognizing that he does not allow universality to swallow up particularity or vice versa. There is also more than an outside possibility that he simply and instinctively reflects the teaching on God's attributes as Scripture presents it, and so brings the unfathomably incomprehensible mystery of God's complementary truth to expression, a mystery that cannot be grasped by the finite mind, able to accommodate "a single tenant" only, but snugly fits in the regenerate heart with its double occupancy. In the latter case, when he asserts that God's being, greatness, strength, wisdom, goodness, etc., etc., are "all the same," he does not necessarily address their identity in the "archetypal" essence of God, but their intertwinement in his Biblical Self-disclosure and embraces with his heart in a childlike fashion what his mind cannot grasp. Hence his reference to "uniform/simple multiformity/manifoldness." This would comport with the statement of Muller, PRRD, III, 57, "to indicate that the divine attributes are essentially identical is necessarily to indicate that they are distinct in another sense, namely, formally, rationally, virtually, or eminently." Augustine's reference to God's incomprehensibility conjoined to his unquestionable knowability, which is a rarity, may suggest this. At any rate, if this is so, his unswerving commitment to Scripture won out, despite some philosophical influences that most Augustine scholars have recognized in his oeuvre. Of course, basically we will never know what went on in his mind, since neither he, nor Bavinck, for that matter, go to any length or detail to explain what exactly they meant. However, if the latter interpretation is correct, Augustine does not explicitly focus on what Dolezal addresses, namely the attributal essence of God *ad intra*. This is also to say that he may not have progressed (or

³⁵² Bavinck, RD, II, 126; see for this also Dolezal, AG, 53-54.

³⁵³ Augustine, "On the Trinity," in Whitney J. Oates, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York: Random House, Publishers, 1948), Vol. II, Book VI, 4, 6; Book XV, 5.

³⁵⁴ Bavinck, RD, II, 127, 177. But it may well be that he applies this "formula" to the several names of God, all of which refer to same full divine being, and not to the Tri-personality of God or to his essential Divine attributes. N

³⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XII, 19.

regressed?) as much as some Medieval Scholastics, while, incidentally, Bavinck who embraced Augustine may well have moved beyond them.³⁵⁶

Let us, finally, look at what Richard Muller concludes from his near-exhaustive examination of the way the doctrine of Divine Simplicity was viewed through the Centuries, especially by the 13th Century Medieval Scholastics, the 16th Century Reformers and the 17th and 18th Century scholastic Reformed orthodoxy. For the results of this examination, see Muller, PRRD, III, 36-45, 53-58, 70-78, 136, 169, 195-208, 212-216, 220-226, 230-239, 256, 273-284 (esp. 278), 286-298, 512-515, IV, 395. It is sufficient for our purposes to summarize the highlights.

For a foundational starter, PRRD, III, 277-278, there is total unanimity that simplicity spells “the most perfect unity of divine essence and attributes, excluding all real composition.” The Godhead is not only “devoid of all composition and division,” but also “incapable of compositionability and divisibility.” “While the Reformers were more biblically concrete and applicatory, and the post-Reformation thinkers more speculatively philosophical and metaphysical, both were in basic agreement with each other, as well as with the medieval doctors on this basic concept.” However, all three groupings also had to grapple with the nature of the “distinctions” in the Godhead not only in terms of God’s Tri-personality but also with regards to his attributes. Especially in the arena of God’s attributes there was not always unanimity of expression as they sought to identify the apparent “complexity of the Godhead.” In fact, already at this point we can state with a good deal of confidence that Muller presents us with a cacophony of views. This may not come as a surprise since simplicity is unique to the eternal, that is supra-temporal God and has no possible identical analogy in temporal created reality. The resulting question, of course, may well be raised whether it can be ever more than some “calculated guesswork?” At any rate, let us look at what Muller concluded without necessarily taking a stand upon its accuracy. It most likely takes a lifetime of study to assess the results of a lifetime of study.

First, regarding the Medieval scholastics, PRRD, III, 41, “The various modern readings of simplicity as indicating an utter absence of distinctions in the Godhead misinterpret the traditional doctrine. Most modern writers have assumed a uniformity of argument in the Middle Ages, whereas there was in fact a massive (!) debate – and the debate was not over the implications of a distinction-less notion of simplicity but over the precise nature of the distinctions that arguably belong to the Godhead.” In general, PRRD, IV, 395, “Medieval scholasticism developed three views. The attributes of God are said to be “conceptually/rationally distinct” (Aquinas), or “formally distinct” (Scotus) in his essence, that is, *ad intra*. Or they are “only distinct *ad extra*” (Ockham).

To make this somewhat intelligible, PRRD, III, 36, 44, 47, 53-57, 70-71, maintains that Aquinas as well as the earlier Gilbert de la Porree and the later Henry of Ghent, reject the essential (*ad intra*) synonymy of God’s attributes. The use and application of the three *viae*, and specifically the *via causalitatis* and the *via eminentiae*, to reach out to God play a decisive role in this. They do imply that the many attributal conceptual/rational distinctions that are predicated of the creaturely mirror image must have a “foundation in the thing” that they reflect (*fundamentum in re*). In fact, “the attributes are genuinely distinct in God as *rationes*, and thus distinct in a conceptual and formal sense in God himself.” If the attributes were not distinct *eminenter* in God, the *viae*, especially the *via eminentiae*, would be *viae* to nowhere, which would turn the attributes into a figment of the imagination. So, “divine attributes signify the one thing (*unam rem*),” namely God, “but they signify him under diverse and multiple concepts which are not synonyms (*non sunt synonyma*)” (Aquinas, ST, 1a, q. 13, art. 4). However, what Aquinas does not do ... is make clear precisely what kind of distinction there may be in the thing that is reflected in the distinction made by reason concerning the thing.” However, a word of caution is in place. To refuse synonymy to God’s attributes “as they *rest upon* the thing as its foundation,” which is the

³⁵⁶ Bavinck, RD, II, 118-131, 170, 173-177, makes frequent mention of God’s simplicity. In RD, II, 124, he makes the following point, “Although we cannot make a distinction between God’s essence and attributes (seeing that each attribute consists of this essence, it does not follow that distinctions among the attributes themselves are merely nominal and subjective without any basis in reality.” He seems to contest “that the attributes we ascribe to God are identical with his being and can only differ among themselves in our minds, that is subjectively” and hence objects to the view that “all God’s attributes are synonymous.” There clearly is a difference of interpretation among the icons of Reformed orthodoxy regarding the “first order” simplicity. It seems that these icons do not always see the issues clearly and therefore do send us mixed signals.

essence of God, is not necessarily to imply that there is distinction in the foundation. As we now shall see, Scotus affirms it, while Ockham denies it. It is rather clear that Dolezal, without being an Ockham nominalist, comes to the same conclusion, as we shall see further below as well.

Scotus, PRRD, III, 71-73, distanced himself from both Aquinas and Henry of Ghent. The distinction of God's attributes does not just have a "foundation" in God's essence" (*fundamentum in re*). That is, it is not "based" upon God's essence," where "simplicity, without an identifiable kind of distinction, still reigns even if the distinctions we apprehend are somehow founded on the reality of the one, absolute divine essence." The distinction is not just analytic/conceptual/rational, "correct from our side, but not from God's side. The distinction is "formal," to be taken in the Aristotelian sense of "essential." It is less ultimate than "real" and "substantive," which could be construed as composition, and still "inherent," and so more than "conceptual and rational," which could be viewed as loosening the relationship between the essence and attributes of God. In short, the distinction is somehow in a general sense *in* God. "Just as infinite justice is "formally" distinct from infinite mercy in the same way as finite justice is distinct from finite goodness." It is rather clear that wishes to pinpoint the nature of the distinction in God and in the process finds Aquinas wanting.

Ockham, PRRD, III, 74-76, is the opposite of Scotus. Where Scotus wishes to strengthen the distinction and advocates "a fuller sense," Ockham "presses in the other direction." "The attributes are merely our finite and composite conceptions of God *ad extra*, names, terms, words, with which we signify God without reference to his essence. To Ockham both Aquinas and Scotus, but Scotus even more, "violate the simplicity of God." There are no distinctions *ad intra*, whether rational or formal. "Their essential identity rules out any distinctions." His denial of any, and all distinctions in the Godhead, of course, brought him face to face with the "problem" of the Trinity, which he upheld. How could he honor both? His solution was uncomplicated. In the doctrine of the Trinity, faith simply trumps reason. Don't give it any other thought.

Second, PRRD, III, 136, 288-297, asserts that it should not escape anyone that the mentors who guided the Reformed orthodox in crafting their positions were Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, respectively. This said, "the influence of Thomist, Scotist, and nominalist thought on the orthodox doctrine of the attributes was of enough importance that the orthodox needed to define their position over against that of the great medieval systems with great care. They accepted ... the assumption of a disproportion between the finite and the infinite, but they were at the same time unwilling to press the distinction to the point that the principle of analogy utterly disappeared—as also they were unwilling to press the argument over the precise manner of distinction to be found between the divine attributes to the point of insisting categorically that the attributes must be eminently or rationally rather than formally, distinct, or indeed rather than distinct only *ad extra*. Since this resulted in a smorgasbord of views, Muller's designation of the "hybrid approaches" of the Reformed orthodox is well taken as they face and made to opt for three possibilities (1) the attributes are essentially one in God, but known to reason as distinct in their operation *ad extra*, (2) the attributes are essentially one in God, and understood by us as distinct *ratio ratiocinata cum fundamento in re* (by reason of analysis--calculated analytical-reckoning--with a foundation in the thing), but are also recognized to be distinct in God *eminenter* or *virtualiter* and, according to some of the Reformed writers, distinct *realiter* in their effects; and (3) the attributes are essentially identical in God, externally *rationaliter* or *formaliter*, as known in their operations and distinct in the Godhead itself *eminenter* or *virtualiter*.

In greater detail, while the Reformed orthodox "assume the simplicity of the divine essence, they all understand the attributes as in some sense distinct." (So did also Calvin, according to Muller, PRRD, III, 274.) As such, they fall by and large in line with the Medieval scholastics. Some "argue the essential identity of the attributes, point to their rational distinction *ad extra* on the basis of their effects," either drawing the conclusion that there is "no distinction of attributes *ad intra*" (whether *a la* Ockham or not; Alting, Maccovius), or, slightly more careful, without "specifically stating their view concerning God's *ad intra* distinctions in the light of the utter incomprehensibility of God (Owen). Many others hold "in continuity with the medieval discussion that distinctions between attributes can be defined *ad intra*, whether as eminent or virtual," either "following a more or less late Thomistic argument" (Maresius) or "with a slight variant--namely, an eminent distinction of the attributes," but "adopting a slightly Scotist accent (Turretin), allowing for a formal distinction of the attributes in their *ad extra* conception in the mind." The majority, however, opts for "an essential identity with an eminent or virtual distinction intrinsic to the divine essence, reflected in the distinction of attributes in their operation *ad extra*," while "a not insignificant group of Reformed thinkers held to a most nominalist pattern of explanation, arguing that the attributes are distinct only in our conceptions of the Godhead *ad extra*—while nonetheless insisting on the real distinction of the divine persons *ad intra*."

The scenario as summarized elicits the following sets of comments on the part of Muller. These comments are based on Muller's survey of the several positions that, once again I assume to be true to fact.

(1) PRRD, III, 297, maintains that the majority of the Reformed orthodox do not *hold* that “in the essence of God, that is in God *ad intra*, the attributes are synonymous.” (See, PRRD, III, 274, 279-280, 284-298, for a lengthy discussion on the matter). This runs parallel PRRD, III, 57, which states that “to indicate that divine attributes are essentially identical is necessarily to indicate that they are also distinct in another sense, formaliter, etc.”

(2) PRRD, III, 288, designates the views of the Reformed Protestants as “hybrid approaches.” Since these “icons” do not always see eye to eye on the matter at hand and send us “mixed signals” this designation is difficult to contest.

(3) PRRD, III, 134-136, 216, mentions “the non-polemic lack of consensus!” “The absence of polemic here is quite remarkable.” To be sure, “the disagreement is obvious.” But “there appears never to have been an internal controversy over this subject--certainly the level of disagreement fell far short of the rancor of the debates over (other topics, such as) covenant theology, etc.” This assessment comports with the approach of Turretin, EIT, I, 191-194.

(4) PRRD, III, 213, 220, indicates that the traditional categories, the language of eminence, negation, and cause used by philosophy, remained in obvious force in the light of the relationship between the infinite God and the finite creature. Even if “they turned into categories of analysis or organization into which biblically revealed attributes were gathered for purposes of exposition,” and undoubtedly application as well!

(5) By way of conclusion, PRRD, III, 298, summarizes as follows. Since “the finite cannot capture the infinite” (*finitum non capax infiniti*), “the mind cannot conceive of the way in which the attributes belong to the utter simplicity of the divine essence. Nevertheless, the distinct attributes are correctly distinguished by reason in the effects and operations of God in the world--and these effects and operations rightly and genuinely reveal the identity of God, indeed the indivisible essence of the utterly simple Godhead. The effect of this distinction is to direct attention away from the divine essence toward the divine economy: this in the reputedly speculative doctrine of the divine attributes. In practical terms this economic direction of the language points directly toward the Protestant orthodox insistence that all of the attributes have implications for piety and toward the intensely practical sections found not only in the English Puritan discussions of the divine attributes but also in many of the continental Reformed representations of the attributes.” Writes Owen (PRRD, III, 205, “God has revealed himself ... in many distinct properties, all of them suited in our mind our whole duty towards God, and this or that duty in particular. And he often distinctly presses upon us the consideration of these properties, for to stir us up unto those distinct duties which they direct unto ... So, in places innumerable does he mind us of his power and greatness ... that we might be stirred up to fear him, to trust in him, to get our hearts filled with a due reverence of him.” So also, Calvin (PRRD, III, 206-207) who focuses throughout on practical application, shunning “in dislike” “excessive metaphysical speculation into the doctrine of the divine attributes,” and equally “with little sympathy” “the abstruse discussions of the divine essence.” Undoubtedly the endless speculations and discussions of the Medieval scholastic type! (See also, PRRD, III, 170.) Even if in all this no explicit reference is made to Deut. 29:29, the presence of the contours of this passage is both gratefully seen and acknowledged.

(5) By way of final addition, PRRD, III, 65-66, 179-180, 512-515, presents some pointers that are illuminating (and priceless) for a Biblical Apologetics. First, the Reformers pay scant attention to the “proofs of God’s existence” deviating from both Anselm and Aquinas. To be sure, Anselm’s so-called ontological argument and Aquinas’ so-called “cosmological argument” for the existence of God are not even meant to “proofs” of a syllogistic compelling nature. Anselm’s “effort” has been designated as “less a demonstration of the divine existence than as an exercise in the logic of language about God,” and Aquinas’ “Five Ways” as “arguments for what we already accept,” and more specifically as “part of a negative theology that show what God is not (not a moved mover, etc.). In both these men it came down to “faith (!) that was in search of understanding.” But even this “lesser” approach is shunned by the Reformers. The reason is simple. It is impossible to convey the light of truth, however magnificent in Scripture, nature, history, or experience, to folks who are “blind,” let alone “willfully” blind! “The scribes and Pharisees, the boastful gentle philosophers of ancient times, prelates and ‘Seraphical doctors, with other great pontifical Priests’ are excluded from the truth because they have no desire to know it. They are blinded and ‘provoked into a raging fury against Disciples and ministers of the Truth.’ So, Musculus! He truly covers the waterfront, inclusive of the “Greeks” and their “Offspring.” However, it is the same truth, and this only, with its all-illuminating light that has “the efficacy and strength” to remove the “blindness” and, therewith, the “darkness.” Would it not be advantageous, to put it mildly, for today’s apologetics to go to school with the Reformers? All too human so-called “proofs” or even “arguments” are not up to the task. Frankly, none of the apologetic proofs or arguments with which I am acquainted, the ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, epistemological, design-full, and even the

often-celebrated transcendental one, seems to take this “(rebellious) blindness” *methodologically* into account. The problem of the heart is and remains the heart of the problem! To overlook or ignore this is to end up in “barrenness.” It is “the fool” who “in his (corrupt) heart” denies the existence of God (Ps. 14:1). Some years ago I listened to an “iconic” debate between a Christian theologian-philosopher apologist and a prominent rank atheist, where the transcendental argument for the existence of God (TAG) took centerstage. I came away with the conclusion that it was an admittedly “brilliant exercise,” but one “in total sterility.” Mental agreement was the aim. The “blindness” was not even mentioned, not in the (beckoning) opening statement, nor in the course of the debate. What a lost opportunity to do so compassionately and with tears in the footsteps of Paul (Rom. 9:2; 1 Cor. 9:22b; 10:33; Phil. 3:18). Of course, this is not to deny that the Living God of Scripture is the only ground and guarantee for all intelligibility. Neither is it to deny that all those who reason on any other ground are guaranteed to end up in self-contradiction. See also the Michael Martin – John Frame Debate On-Line, in which they square off on TANG (The Transcendental Argument for the Non-existence of God) versus TAG (The Transcendental Argument for the Existence of God). For the notion of “proof” in Reformed orthodoxy, see yet PRRD, III, 170-195).

My provisional comments on all this, are threefold.

(1) Regardless the accuracy of the various assessments, conclusions, and drawn implications by Muller and others, the general lay of the land can hardly be missed. This gives us the impetus to move on.

(2) Muller’s assessment appears to run at least partly counter to the claim of Dolezal, AIG, 74. The latter gives the impression that the *intrinsic identity* of God’s attributes was an established fact, even if he was somewhat hesitant in his wording. Muller, PRRD, IV, 420, expresses his “hope that the vast reservoir of materials,” covered in his clearly extraordinary four volumes, “will be increasingly opened to detailed and duly and contextualized study.” Maybe further research can settle why and to what extent there is at this point a divergence of analyses. At any rate, all this can serve as a confirmation that what could be described as a cacophony of opinions may have arisen from the fact that their authors sought to enter forbidden territory. If this is the case, whether in whole or in part, confusion is and must be the reward. Further, it should not escape anyone that, according to Muller, the mentors who guided the Reformed orthodox in crafting their positions were Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, respectively. Additional research could also determine to what extent these Medievals, who drank heavily from the thinking fountain of ancient philosophers, allowed them to put an indelible stamp of “empty deceit” upon their theologizing. That is, to what extent what was billed as a “handmaiden” managed to take over as a “mistress.” A well-researched and well-argued volume could (should!) go a long way to produce a revealing X-ray of the true state of affairs, aiming at a transparent overview, unearthing its philosophical roots, presenting an accurate assessment, whether approving, critical, or mixed, and a concluding with a call to action, that sanitizes, forges ahead, or combines both. Unless such volume is theoretical-*practical*, using the terminology of Reformed orthodoxy, it is marked by sterility, regardless its possible, approvable, and applaudable excellence. In short, it must contain and advance truth-unto-obedience in a truly Pauline fashion. The totality of his Romans with the panorama of its impressive, if not majestic doctrinal mountain peaks that should take one’s breath away, resembles a “road deck” between the two twin pillars of “the obedience of faith,” from its beginning to its end (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Paul mirrors at length, in fact, is an extended footnote on what the earlier James sought to convey in shorthand. “Hearing and doing” are inseparable, like a Siamese twin. To pursue separation is delusory, to succeed in this, would spell death (Jam. 1:19-27).

(3) All this may well precipitate a telling question! Did, what could well be described as a cacophony of views possibly arise from the fact that their authors sought to enter forbidden territory? If this is the case, whether in whole or in part, confusion is and must be the inevitable result.

(4) Last, but not least, none of the folks whom we surveyed or encountered in this Spotlight alerted us to the complementarity of truth that puts a principal leash on human reasoning, whether theological or otherwise. To be sure, there is a uniform 20/20 vision of the infinite gap between God and his creation. In one instance, we may even recognize a cautionary approach that does take God’s incomprehensibility into account. But no trace of the fundamental significance of the complementarity of truth that only can prevent the theological enterprise from deteriorating into a theo-ontological undertaking which seeks to cross “a bridge too far.” Of course, any such undertaking is illegitimate, collapses of its own weight, and must be discarded *in toto*. To what extent scholasticism of any sort was, is, or turned theo-ontological, with all that this entails, stands in need of careful consideration. So, let us proceed with looking into this by returning to “the main menu.”

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To put all this in perspective and to arrive at the bottom line, let me focus first on the proposition that, even if they are distinct *ad extra*, in the essence of God all his attributes are and must be identical and synonymous to avoid composition. and then concentrate in short order on the counter proposition that God's attributes are not only distinct *ad extra*, but also *ad intra* without, of course, ending up with an unacceptable composite!

We may appreciate the animus of a definite trend in present-day scholarship to stay anchored in what is said to be a (questionable) historical scholastic consensus. But the acceptance of the synonymy conclusion does raise a question. Where in God's interactive Self-disclosure in Scripture as the *ultimate* reference point is there any indication that all his perfections, presented by necessity as diverse in creaturely language, come with equal necessity down to the same thing in the a-temporal being of God? To be more concrete, however "attractive" this may sound, is the so-called ec-typal (derived) and *revealed* "diversity" of God's attributes in time, inclusive of a change, such as from wrath to grace, really a mere inevitably *refracted* reflection of a so-called arche-typal (original) and *hidden* identity in eternity? For that matter, are *all* the revealed perfections, by unavoidable definition, truly creaturely expressed derivations from a hidden *synonymous* Divine reality?

Since there is admittedly "no single Biblical proof" for it,³⁵⁷ the only answer we receive is that the identification of God as "light (1 John 1:5) and "love" (1 John 4:8), which as abstracts defies a composition of parts, as well as his transcendence-type of attributes, such as, his "independence," his "infinity," etc., do, indeed, *must* demand this identity-conclusion by "good and necessary consequence," which is an age-old rule of responsible hermeneutics, also endorsed by the WCF, I, 6.³⁵⁸ This kind of conclusion, so goes the "argument," is not and cannot be accused of being far-fetched. After all, it has been embraced and advanced by a goodly number, if not all classic-historical icons.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Dolezal, AG, 44. See also Mastricht, TPT, II, 143, who states that "Scripture teaches simplicity whenever it represents God, not only in composite and concrete terms, but in simple and abstract terms, when it calls him love (1 John 4:8, 16), life (1 John 5:20), light, in which there is no darkness (1 John 1:5), that is, a deity in which there is nothing heterogeneous, a deity that is nothing but pure deity." However, John Howe argues that "God has not by his word taught us to ascribe to him universal, absolute simplicity." Specifically, "'the word' simplicity is not 'among his attributes' mentioned in Scripture – and although the thing signified by the word, when rightly understood, can and should be applied to our understanding of God, it is obvious that Scripture does not identify God as 'in every respect most absolutely simple.'" This is quoted in Muller, PRRD, III, 280. The latter also explains how Howe reacts to Spinoza who with his philosophical momism "intrudes into the deep and most profound arcana of the divine nature" by insisting on "absolute simplicity," and denying the Trinity in the process. On the other hand, Mastricht, as well as others, use the same terminology as Spinoza to indicate that the essence of God is "utterly devoid of all kinds of composition," and in the process to combat the anti-Trinitarian Socinians who deny the Tri-Personal distinction in the Godhead. "Absolute simplicity," apparently, can be used in three ways. (1) Simplicity *without* any distinctions in terms of the Persons and the attributes in God. (2) Simplicity *with* distinctions in terms of the Persons and the attributes in God. (3) Simplicity *with* distinctions in terms of the Persons, but *without* distinctions in terms of the attributes in God.

³⁵⁸ Dolezal, AG, 44-50, 70.

³⁵⁹ Dolezal, AG, 50-58, 74. 76. 77. For one sample, see George Swinnock, quoted in Dolezal, 40, "God's attributes are one indivisible essence, to will and to understand, and to love and to hate, and to be are all the same and one in God;" 74. "His justice is his mercy, and his wisdom is his patience, and his knowledge is his faithfulness, etc., etc.;" 76, "God's attributes are all one and the same, as when the sunbeams shine through a yellow glass they are yellow, a green glass they are green, all the while the beams are the same;" 77, "God's attributes are one most pure essence diversely apprehended by us, as it is diversely manifested to us."

However, even if this identity/synonymity conclusion eventually and somehow would prove or be vindicated to be right on,³⁶⁰ is it *creaturely permissible* to draw it and is it *confessionally admissible* to require it, *especially* if there is another conclusion, which I aim to identify in my last Section, that may be equally if not more tenable and therefore could claim equal, if not preferable rights? Or do folks with “whatever solution they end up with” regrettably seek to penetrate the secret and *forbidden* impenetrable, and to comprehend, even up to a point, the mysterious and *out of bounds* incomprehensible? At the least, forbidden and out of bounds so as not to compromise, interfere with or detract from the hot pursuit of worshipful obedience that should fill the horizon of every Christian without reservation, regret, or retreat, including folks in the academy? These questions are prompted by the fact that all theo-ontological undertakings of whatever kind and to whatever degree are bound to be a terrible and shameful waste of time and energy that will both be exposed in the Judgment as such, and be consigned to the undoubtedly “huge bonfire” of the Last Day, not just etymologically, a “welcome fire of unspecified bones” but in reality a “destructive fire of bad bones.” In today’s New Covenant terms, the threefold reality is: “Evangelize or Fossilize” (Mt. 28:19a), “‘Cascade’ or Dehydrate” (Mt. 28:19b), and “Sanctify or Petrify” (Mt. 28:20). Any theo-ontology that either puts a brake on this mandated twofold pursuit to “evangelize” and “sanctify” or fails to advance it vigorously must be opposed, rejected, or dismantled wherever in evidence.

Candidly, I am not aware that the question of *permissibility*, with *admissibility* as its correlate, has ever explicitly been asked or faced. Anyone who is trapped in a theo-ontology to whatever degree will not and cannot ask this question to that same degree and may well bristle when brought face to face with it. After all, a possible concession could produce an immense paradigm shift, a veritable Copernican revolution, that makes folks leave their ivory theo-ontological tower to embrace Psalm-like (Ps. 131:2-3) and Job-like (Job 42:1-6), that is, child-like (!), both poles of incomprehensible complementary truth as well as of straightforward forbidden truth, subsequently to focus exclusively upon a Petrine and Pauline pursuit of Christ’s Grand Command that calls for suffering and death (John 12:24; 21:18-19; 2 Cor. 4:8-12; 11:22-33; Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 3:16) in order to be graced with “souls” and “holiness.”

All this must be placed in the context of a Revival Culture that is rooted in and marked by twelve realities, starting with the mighty presence of the Holy Spirit, which produces torrents of living water (John 7:37-39) subsequently evident in mighty prayer, mighty preaching, mighty conversions, mighty assemblies, mighty holiness, mighty generosity, mighty evangelism, under mighty leaders in mighty combat, in mighty pursuit of Christ’s Grand Triple Command to climb the hills of souls and holiness as “the only thing needful” (For all this, see Acts 1-12).³⁶¹ It does not take too much personal as well as ecclesiastical self-

³⁶⁰ Somewhat like Wolterstorff’s “for the sake of the argument” concession, IG, 163, that Jam. 1:16 possibly does affirm “God’s ontological immutability.”

³⁶¹ The Revival phenomenon is a controversial issue. From my perspective, Biblical Revival with its twelve characteristics is not just the responsibility of man, something that humans stamp out of the ground in the *present* in a Semi-Pelagian Way (Charles Finney). Neither is it simply a sovereign work of God with which he at some *future* occasion serendipitously and infrequently graces us (Iain Murray). No, it is unleashed in the *past*! God opened a fountain in Jerusalem (Zech. 13:1) in the space of fifty-two days. He started its construction on Good Friday with the Cross of Christ, continued it on the next Sunday with his Resurrection, and completed it on Pentecost with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Immediately thereafter *torrents* of living Holy Spirit water (John 7:38-39) started to flood

examination to recognize the enormous shortfall that is evidence today across the board in all these twelve areas. Ironically, this is the same shortfall that clearly “bedeviled” Medieval scholasticism and was for a time suspended in and by the Reformation. At any rate, this should both break and occupy our hearts. The prevailing theo-ontologies that misspent time and energy may well (undoubtedly?) have made a fair contribution to this sad and shameful reality!

In the meantime, it is encouraging to read that possibly the prominent author who these days puts up a fight to defend and advance the “classic” view of the simplicity of God refuses “to comprehend God in some scientific sense or to dispel the mystery of His being.”³⁶² In other words, he refuses to permit autonomous thinking to have the final word, a thinking which not so incidentally is invariably theo-ontological. This may mean that he would at least be willing to consider the possibility that not all seemingly “good and necessary consequences” are *permissible*, therefore must be declared *inadmissible*, and as a result could not possibly be designated as good and necessary in the first place.

Frankly, in this regard his Mutabilist counterparts are not of much help. Their type of theo-ontologies, as we shall see below, draws conclusions that possibly raise even more questions. But how about his fellow Immutabilists? Many do reject the so-called simplicity “construct” that regards all perfections as identical and synonymous out of hand, and register their protest, clearly for one simple reason. It is not verifiable from Scripture! Let us look at three authors. We read in one author, “The ‘prattle’ that all the perfections of God (such as, his mercy and his justice) would be identical is certainly not oriented to the teaching of Holy Scripture. Of course, Holy Scripture does convey that when we encounter (one perfection, such as) God’s justice, we also detect and experience (others, such as) his mercy”³⁶³ What is the conclusion that we must draw from this, according to a second author? “We do not assert a simplicity that dissolves all the distinct colors of God’s attributes into a gray blur,” with reference to Augustine who affirms “God’s ‘simple multiplicity or manifold simplicity.’”³⁶⁴ A third author also chimes in, “though every attribute is identical with the

Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch and beyond. There is no indication whatsoever that these torrents were providentially meant to turn into trickles. Their presence is undoubtedly due to the sovereign grace of God. But this does not exclude the responsibility of man to thirst for, come to, and drink from Jesus, literally, to *flood* spiritual deserts and turn them into fields teeming with crops (Is. 32:15, 20), as well as “Dead Seas” and transform them into fresh bodies of water, brimful with fish (Ezek. 47:8-9) (John 7:37). Their absence can only be due to human folly (Ps. 85:8c). In a word, the floodtide of Revival fires originates in God. This calls for incessant thanksgiving. But for their ebbtide we have only ourselves to blame. This calls for heartfelt repentance (Rev. 2:5). The latter is endorsed by the Semi-Pelagian, Charles Finney, who majors in human responsibility. The absence of Revival fires is laid solely at the feet of man, be it lamentably at the *expense* of Divine sovereignty. There is no trace of all this in the Calvinist, Iain Murray. In his one-sided emphasis upon Divine sovereignty, he appears to award their absence to Divine Providence that accounted for large (planned) intervals between Revivals. This, of course, calls for prayer. But the need for repentance does not even enter the equation. This missing link may well explain its “rarity” in the first place. Jesus’ “Seven Letters” recorded in Rev. 2 and 3 in which the summons to repentance is a regular staple can only bolster this conclusion. At any rate, the twelve characteristics of Biblical Revival display the intricate intertwinement of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which also comes to expression in passages, such as Is. 62:6-7 and Phil. 2:12-13. All this solidifies the explanation that for Revival presence we have only God to thank, but for its absence only ourselves to blame. This is complementarity of truth at its biblically finest.

³⁶² Dolezal, AG, 38.

³⁶³ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, I, 117.

³⁶⁴ Beeke, I, 633. Frankly, I have not fully been able to determine from Augustine’s writing whether his formulation of “simple multiplicity” and “manifold simplicity” intends to make an archetypal or only an ectypal predication. If

divine being, the attributes are nevertheless distinct ... and are not interchangeable ... Every attribute expresses something special.”³⁶⁵

All this is plain language. But, basically, I do not find these three “protests” sufficiently helpful, for the simple reason that they *are not* sufficiently helpful. The so-called “Classic” doctrine of Divine simplicity under discussion here does *not* deny the distinct colors of God’s perfections as they are and must necessarily be (ectypally) *revealed* in complex creaturely terms. Creaturely language and concept formation, once operational, has *no other option* than “to *refract* the *essentially* un-refracted original.”³⁶⁶ However, this doctrine *does* insist that there never was, never is, and never will be a “distinct coloration” in the (arche-typal) *simplex essence* of God--and here is the root of the argument, if not its “stinger.” This must be stipulated as such supposedly “by good and necessary consequence.”

This latter stipulation, if not caveat (?), is the reason why I am inclined to go a bit beyond the three unhelpful (missing-the-point) “protestations” that we encountered thus far. It seems to me that it is impossible, if not improper (?), *merely* to deny or to reject the supposed truth of the “essential identity” proposition regarding the Divine attributes. After all, this proposition pertains to the hidden and incomprehensible essence of God. So, who (really) knows whether it is true to fact or not? Maybe we will find out, or maybe not. But there seems to be a good reason (every reason?) to deny its *propriety* by concluding that it, hopefully, if not clearly, in unwitting and unintentional “arrogance,” “pries into the secrets of God”³⁶⁷ as it seeks to penetrate the impenetrable by insisting on a logical consequence that is impermissible and therefore inadmissible. The better part of wisdom, in fact, the only acceptable and fitting wisdom is to refrain from any, and all inadmissible logic, really in heartfelt repentance, and to start worshipping God both and *simultaneously* in his immanent and incomprehensible transcendence and in his transcendent and knowable immanence and to do so in the pursuit of “the beauty of (the enlarged and sharply focused NT) holiness,” and ... *to leave it at that!*³⁶⁸ As mentioned already, however, an effort will be made below to make a proposal that should be permissible.

At any rate, let me hasten to add that all this by no means undercuts the *simplicitas Dei*, as we may and *must Scripturally* and therefore *creaturely* embrace and ever underscore it in the footsteps of Augustine. He seems to tremble in God’s presence as he does cross every revealed bridge but refuses to go a bridge too far when he embraces the incomprehensible complementarity of disclosed truth which does not fit in his finite and “tiny” brain since it can accommodate only one tenant at a time but snugly fits into his regenerate and “wide open” heart, graced with double occupancy. Accordingly, he worships God as *creaturely revealed* in the “simple multiplicity” and “manifold simplicity” of his being and in the

the former, Beeke’s reference is not apropos. The latter’s statement appears to aim at the ectypal functioning of the Divine attributes.

³⁶⁵ Bavinck, RD, II, 124-126.

³⁶⁶ We get the impression that (even) God could not have done any “better,” given the parameters that he sovereignly stipulated for his (temporal and spatial) creation in its (metaphysical) finitude and with its (epistemological) limitation.

³⁶⁷ Beeke, I, 644.

³⁶⁸ It is always refreshing to encounter a reticence to enter incomprehensible territory. When we are “in the dark,” we must abstain. See for a sample of this reticence, Muller, PRRD, IV, 376-378. One should not even try to define “the procession of the Spirit” from the Father and the Son, especially not the “procession ad intra,” that is, “the ‘eternal procession.’” The same applies to the difference between (the) “begetting” (of the Son) and (the) “procession” (of the Spirit). “I certainly do not grasp the distinction ... I am not desirous of this, nor am I able” (Pictet).

“simply manifold” and “uniformly multiform” nature of his wisdom.³⁶⁹ The biblically fed fullness of as well as the creaturely mandated restraint in his worship is remarkable.³⁷⁰

It reflects the equally remarkable animus of Chalcedon in its positive and exuberant confession of the harmonious union of both the Divine and the human nature in the One Person of the incarnate Christ in combination with the refusal to enter the hidden and forbidden territory of the essential relationship of the two natures by promulgating the well-known negatives of “without confusion,” “without change,” “without division,” “without separation.” This is not a *via negativa* that restlessly seeks to feel (grope?) its way into the fog of an undefinable reality, but rather a *veneratio negativa* that Job-like finds its cognitive resting place in its obedient determination to stay away from a well-defined incomprehensible reality!³⁷¹ No evidence in Chalcedon (for once?) of even the slightest trace of the theo-ontological arrogance, whether conscious and intentional or not, that seems to be so ubiquitous and damaging in Church history!³⁷²

All in all, the bottom line for this section is rather clear. It comes down to a question. Is it *permissible* to conclude that Divine simplicity requires for us to state unequivocally that in the Divine essence all his perfections are identical and synonymous? The argument was that this safeguards the mystery of God!³⁷³ However, if it is impermissible, this conclusion

³⁶⁹ Bavinck, 127, 130, was a stickler on complementarity as well. The simplicity of God does not convey the notion of an “abstract divine essence,” but rather that it is “infinitely and profusely rich,” something that “no creature can grasp all at once,” since it spells “fullness of being.” Furthermore, “God remains eternally and immutably the same ... But the relationship in which he stands to his creatures and they to him varies.” Both transmit true knowledge. This is Biblical complementarity at its finest. Although contradictory truths vis-à-vis the all too human mind, they are fully harmonious ones in the regenerate heart, with “cognitive, volitional and emotional rest” to boot.

³⁷⁰ This commending “conclusion,” of course, reflects my “take” of Augustine’s “input.” Muller, PRRD, II, talks about the need of enormous amounts of research to settle interpretation issues in the rich and voluminous writings of Reformed orthodoxy. The precise meaning of Augustine’s “simple multiplicity” and “multiple simplicity” is a most likely candidate for further research as well. He clearly does not appear to have the Trinitarian Being of God in mind when he pens this double “formula.” Of course, this would be very appropriate. One in Essence and multiple in Persons. No, his focus is the perfections of God. But the question is whether this double formula pertains to *Deus ad intra* or to *Deus ad extra* is not altogether clear. My earlier “take” was that this issue was not in his purview. Hence the revealed *Deus ad extra* context is most likely his starting point and the basis of his “formula,” without going into the later scholastic intricacies. Even Bavinck, RD, II, 126-127, is not clear enough to determine that he is totally sure how to take Augustine’s statement.

³⁷¹ Ury, TP, 78, correctly argues that “the *via negativa* resident in pure Neoplatonism is fundamentally illogical, because there had to be some way of connecting all that was with that source, the immutable ‘One,’ upon which all is dependent.”

³⁷² This is not to say that negativity has the ultimate say. Chalcedon stays away from incomprehensibility, all right! It leaves the *mystery* of godliness alone. “God revealed in the *flesh*” (1 Tim, 3:16)! But it is *utterly* positive in that it confessed the *unity* in one Person of the Divine and the human nature, each of which retained its *own* properties. So, Kamphuis, 55-56.

³⁷³ Dolezal, AG, 123; see also 78, 130, 134. It seems to me that Dolezal, AG, 113, pinpoints more clearly what the mystery is, “The mystery is that the OT and NT affirmations of divine unity clearly include distinct persons.” See also AG, 121-122, which provides a quotation of Louis Berkhof, “God is one in his essential being, but in this one being are three persons, called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These persons are not, however, like so many persons among men three entirely separate and distinct individuals.” So far, so good. But less fortunate, and better left unsaid, is his addition, “They are rather three modes or forms in which the divine essence exists.” This is undoubtedly well-intentioned. It is designed to affirm the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. So, no contest here. But there seems sufficient reason to mark the *language* as theo-ontological. “Persons” are not “modes or forms!” It seems inconceivable to me to preach Christ as a “mode” or “form.” A congregational audience would be hard put to understand this. Why not proclaim in all biblical simplicity that the Person of Christ is the Incarnate Son of God, who together with the Father

ironically has the opposite effect. It would inadmissibly seek to make the mystery (somewhat) intelligible by and to the human mind. Further, if it is impermissible and inadmissible, by moving beyond the pale of Holy Writ, it would come down to a waste of time and energy. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. If it creates a rift among brothers, blasts a united front into bits and essentially puts the threefold Marching Order of the Commander-in-Chief on the back burner in spoken and written word or in hands-on deed, it would have too many strikes against it! It must impoverish the Church and jeopardize its mission in the process. But before we come to a “final” conclusion (verdict), it pays off first to look at a vastly or partly different view of Divine Immutability, usually operating from and proceeding hand in hand with a divergent analysis and assessment of the biblical data.

By way of provisional summary, as I studied the materials it became increasingly clear to me that the “use of the three *viae*,” “the analogy concept,” and the definition of the Divine attributes in their relation to each other in *Deus ad intra*” are all part and parcel of efforts to reach Transcendence from the perspective of Immanence (the three *viae*), to make Transcendence intelligible in its relationship to Immanence (analogy), or to define Transcendence beyond the arena of Immanence (the synonymity of the attributes). As such, they all may well “sin” against the incomprehensible complementarity of truth by seeking to make theo-ontological predications about the *Inner Sanctum* of God’s essential “secrets” in one way or another (Deut. 29:29a), arguably at the neglect, if not the expense of the detailed promulgated and mandated Divine ethics that finds its summation in the Grand Command of our Commander-in-Chief (Mt. 29:19-20).

Of course, this critique of the several prongs of the theo-ontological enterprise receives its impetus from the perennial and widespread failure (refusal?) to make Divine “ethics,” of course, based upon “the unity of the revealed faith” (Eph. 4:13a, 14), one’s all-overriding priority (Eph. 4:13c, 15). The OT emphatically stresses this (Deut. 29:29). The NT is not too far behind, if the letters of both Jesus and the several NT authors are any indication. That this should call for a great awareness in Church History, if not serve as an alarm bell and a wake-up call, is a no-brainer.

All this has also a Message for those who hold that there are not only obvious attribute distinctions *ad extra*, but also *ad intra*, in the very essence of God. Spotlight XII covered the various efforts to identify the *ad intra* distinctions, focusing on the Thomist one (“rational” distinctions *resting on* the essence of God) and the Scotist one (“formal” distinctions *lodging in* the essence of God), without detailing combinations of both which according to Muller, PRRD, III, dotted the landscape as well. Spotlight XII also covered additional terms, beyond “rational” and “formal,” to identify the distinctions, such as *eminenter*, *virtualiter*, etc., etc. Candidly, we owe Muller a huge debt of gratitude for pointing out the virtual “quagmire” of “solutions” in near-exhaustive detail. When I read him correctly, it appears that somehow

and the Holy Spirit is the all-blessed Triune God, whose incomprehensibility can only be embraced by the regenerate heart? But once this occurs, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be praised forever, each for their Person and their Function in the salvation of miserable sinners, turning them into saints of God! It seems to me that to talk about “modes,” or “forms” or for that matter, “relations” that are personal, is at best to sniffle at the incomprehensible and to make it somehow intelligible to the human mind rather than to have it lodge in the regenerate heart. It seems to me as well that the Medieval scholastics who had no hunch of the need for a heart transplant in regeneration simply missed the boat. This, despite features that may be quite acceptable. But it should prevent us from ever booking passage on their ship. There is no doubt in my mind that this warning echoes the all-overriding stance of Luther and Calvin against the content scholasticism of their day. They experienced its destruction of the Gospel, even if they had no truck with some of its theological methodology.

all the efforts to settle the issues at hand got “stuck” at one point or another. Hence the unbelievable divergence that spawned a constant polemic interaction.

Well, what to make of all this? From my perspective a “quagmire” was and is unavoidable when attempts are made to make the ontological “secrets” of God intelligible. The insistence upon the essential “synonymity” of God’s attributes “by good and necessary consequence” and the attempts to spell out the essential “distinction” between the attributes “in search of good and necessary understanding” are woven of the same theo-ontological cloth. They both seem to go “a bridge too far.” If this is correct, the implications are serious. In the areas of our present concern the whole scholastic enterprise, whether Medieval or Post-Reformation orthodox is both illegitimate and undoable. It is illegitimate because God forbids it. It is undoable because it is beyond our pay scale. Hence, it does and must collapse as an (outlawed) house of (pretentious) cards. It is hardly astounding that it has not survived historically, while the volumes of the Reformers and the Puritans are alive and well, and continue to feed the souls of men. Of course, this is not to say that the scholastics are devoid of “positives.” Not at all! Wherever and whenever they avoid theo-ontology, they do and will retain their value, even if their writing “style” may pose problems at times. To that extent they can be consulted with profit, if not great profit. But wherever and whenever theo-ontology takes over, they must be avoided and shown the door. They clutter up the mind, deaden the heart and dry up life.

In conclusion of this Section, it seems clear me that the use of the three *viae* and the application of the analogy concept are beyond rescue. It seems equally clear to me that the smorgasbord of solutions how to verbalize the distinctions of God’s attributes *ad intra* places us before a huge problem. This said, I fully recognize that I have not (yet) arrived at my last word about either the attribute-synonymity or the attribute-distinctiveness in the *ad intra* essence of God. But I aim to get back to both in the final Section of this volume, and to “propose a solution” that hopefully may “unite” brothers and sisters to be or to become “friends,” standing shoulder to shoulder, marching arm in arm, and acting hand in hand, in the “planning” and “execution” of “the only thing needful,” namely, the unswerving pursuit and spelled-out obedience of Christ’s Triple Command! But before we get there, we have a few more bases to cover in the Sections IX-XII.

IX. An Alternative Approach

Even if the present assessment of Thomist and Reformed scholasticism is only partly right on the money, it is quite understandable that it developed a backlash. In the Middle Ages this backlash is noticeable in the Franciscan Bonaventure who was Augustinian in his thinking as well as in Duns Scotus.³⁷⁴ As we saw, the latter decisively rejected the “analogy” concept, opted for “univocity,” and was thereby believed to put “dynamite” under the total Aristotelian scholastic enterprise of his day. Once again, this is not the place or context to analyze and assess the Medieval controversy between the warring parties, including that of (universality) realists versus (particularity) nominalists in detail. The literature is simply too daunting for that. Neither would it serve the purpose of this volume. But it is to alert its readers that there is nothing new under the sun. The concepts of “analogy” and “analogical predication” concept was never set in universal concrete. In fact, how could it?

At any rate, today’s Mutabilists who seem to flood the theological landscape are involved at least in a similar fight as some of their partial or total Medieval “co-belligerents” when they do battle with their “Immutabilist” counterparts. However, in seeking to escape the Charybdis of overdoing the transcendence of God, they seem or even appear to fall victim to the Scylla of overdoing the immanence of God when they attribute temporality, mutability, univocity or, increasingly, suffering to him. Regardless the at times decisive differences among Mutabilists they mostly appear united in one conviction. Unless the *immanentia Dei* is taught and emphasized as they do, a real and effective communication between God and man or even a much-needed *sympathetic* “ministry” of God toward man is impossible. How could an a-temporal eternal, a radically-equivocal, or a not-capable of suffering God possibly be able to interact with or come to the rescue of his complex, temporal, mutable, at best analogical, and suffering creatures in a meaningful and helpful manner?³⁷⁵ Upon the creation of the universe he must at least have assumed either some or all these traits to be relevant to its human inhabitants, that is, to communicate with them, to assist them, to inspire them, or even to commiserate with them. This, of course, is *theo-ontology* with a vengeance. This is in the same *theo-ontological* ballpark as the insistence, according to many, that a God who acts in total and all-determining sovereignty cannot possibly produce a mankind that operates in total freedom and is held fully responsible (Arminianism), and as a similar insistence, according to others, that a God who is the “wholly other” cannot possibly

³⁷⁴ For Duns Scotus, see Storig, *Geschiedenis van de Filosofie*, I, 256-259.

³⁷⁵ In this volume I am not going in any detail about a so-called “co-suffering God.” Hence this Footnote in short order to state my case. A “suffering God” is introduced as a “bed-fellow” of a “suffering mankind” as an “encouragement” in its suffering. For all practical purposes, “misery” is told to take heart, because it has “company,” in fact, an “awesome” company, God himself. So, “love it!” Candidly, this is a grievous error for two reasons. First of all, what good is it to have a “suffering bed fellow” that does not “deliver?” It resembles a sympathetic doctor who has no medicine. But second, and well beyond this, it removes the nature of Christ’s suffering from sight, and turns it into a travesty. His suffering is an atoning, in fact, propitiating suffering that removes the wrath of God and spells deliverance from sin. So the concept of a so-called “suffering God” is a double failure. It does not deliver from suffering, and it cannot deliver from sin!

have anything in common, let alone “kinship,” with his creation (Barthianism). They might as well be non-existing shis that pass each other in a non-existing night.³⁷⁶

The earlier mentioned publication of Dolezal, a prominent Immutabilist, serves us well in drawing up a list of folks who went or go the (theo-ontological!) Mutabilist route, apparently “to save the day,” whether all out or in a more measured fashion. This is, according to its author, by “disregarding, denying, or distorting (reconceiving)” the biblical doctrine.³⁷⁷ Among them we recognize Karl Barth, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ronald Nash, D. A. Carson, Bruce A. Ware, J. I. Packer, Rob Lister, Alvin Plantinga, John Frame, and K. Scott Oliphint. Let me cover just a few authors to understand their arguments and get their point. Once again a limited “threefold” sampling of their views is sufficient for our present purpose, not only to help pave the way of making the case for Biblical Immutability, but also for spelling out the inevitable “ethics” mandated by it. I intend to focus first on Karl Barth, then on Nicholas Wolterstorff, and finally on a number of recent authors who share a general, a similar or even the same unease with the concept of ontological immutability as advanced by the Medieval scholastics and Classic Reformed Orthodoxy.

First, then Karl Barth. Because he is on the come-back trail, it is significant to recognize what he is up to. He is really “a breed apart.” But he goes all out. He is filled with “wrath” against the “god-idea” of Ancient Western philosophy as the immobile rationalistic “Abstract Universal” which he sees perpetuated in Thomas Aquinas and his analogy of (immutable) *being* (*analogia entis*). From his perspective Aristotle’s “god-idea” is radically and totally unacceptable. To embrace it is to end up with a terrible product, a “god” who is “dead” by definition.³⁷⁸ When the Church, whether in the Middle Ages, in the Reformation

³⁷⁶ See for this Wolterstorff, IG, 134, 201; Bavinck, RD, II, 331; Frame, ST, 489.

³⁷⁷ Dolezal, AG, 60-78.

³⁷⁸ KD, II/1, 557. See for this also, Kamphuis, 31. See also Colin E. Gunton, “Towards a Trinitarian Reading of the Tradition: The Relevance of the ‘Eternal’ This includes the so-called “trinitarian” terminology. Anyone who is impacted by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and construes in his footsteps an unbridgeable chasm between a non-objectifiable (“upper”) realm and an objectifying (“lower”) one faces the insurmountable obstacle of seeking to bring the inexpressible to expression. Since all philosophical as well as theological language is objectifying, it is, by definition, disqualified before it is even uttered. There is not and cannot be a one-to-one relationship with the non-objectifiable. This is what Rudolph Bultmann threw in the face of Barth, and with it (correctly) disqualified his total *Church Dogmatics*., even if he did not acknowledge, or even recognize, that it equally disqualified his own “theology” that was embodied and reduced to one concept, The Christ Event.” Water and fire simply do not mix. This is the obstacle that turns, among others, both the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the theology of Karl Barth into radical and total impossibilities. The language that they use consists of no more than an aggregate of empty “ciphers” that call for an immediate replacement in a tragic ever-ongoing Sisyphus process. Heidegger fought this battle throughout his life and admitted the emptiness of all his written and spoken verbiage, unable to transcend whatever he put on paper, when he states in his lecture “Time and Being,” reflecting upon essentially his total oeuvre, that “Er hat nur in Aussagesätzen gesprochen.” This is, that “He had only spoken in objectifying sentences,” which for this very reason did not, does not, and cannot close in on the non-objectifying and non-objectifiable, let alone once and for all establish this. In other words, it is impossible for verbalized (objectifying) universality to catch brute non-verbalizable (non-objectifiable) particularity. In short, with this he conceded that his life’s work, however erudite and profound, constituted no more than a series of inauthentic, non-binding assertions. He admittedly never stopped trying to step over his own shadow and just as admittedly never succeeded in doing so. Every similar new effort suffered the same tragic fate. The structure of Barth’s theology runs parallel to the philosophy of Heidegger. I am not sure whether Barth ever “got it.” His followers clearly never did. Otherwise, they would not have sought to resuscitate him. For a detailed treatment of Heidegger’s philosophy, see Henry Krabbendam, *From Bultmann to Ott*, an unpublished Doctor’s Thesis, available in the Library of Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia, PA (1968), esp. 284. For a (partial) analysis of Barth’s theology, see the relevant sections in Henry Krabbendam, “B.B. Warfield versus G. C. Berkouwer

time, and even up to today, became bedfellows with the Aristotelian-infected Thomistic theo-ontology, Barth simply concluded that it capitulated across the board. As mentioned already, it is a well-known fact that the Church whenever it spoke highly of this type of theo-ontology and used it to defend its Biblical position or make it intelligible with the assistance of its categories, it immediately distanced itself from the implications of Aristotle's onto-theology. "No, God is not an Immobile Mover, a rigid, etc., etc., etc., etc., Being!" But my response to this forceful negation is simple. A "house divided against itself" is not quite reliable or believable. So, the damage was done. It paved the way for Barth to throw out the baby with the bathwater. He did not only attack the Greeks, who ended up with their rationalistic "Absolute Universal" and their scholastic followers, who pinned their hope upon their rationalistic theo-ontological "analogy of being." But he also eliminated the Immutable Awesomely Living and Life-giving God of Scripture.³⁷⁹ Driven by a Kantian inspired "analogy of history" (*analogia historiae; Geschichte*), he ended up with an irrationalist "Absolute Particular" as his "deity," in whatever "cipher" terminology it was or is packaged.

Spotlight XIII

Karl Barth: "Cipher" Language

Barth's "Cipher" language includes the so-called "trinitarian" terminology. Anyone who is impacted by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and construes in his footsteps an unbridgeable chasm between a non-objectifiable ("upper") realm and an objectifying ("lower") one faces the insurmountable obstacle of seeking to bring the inexpressible to expression. Since all philosophical as well as theological language is objectifying, it is, by definition, disqualified before it is even uttered. There is not and cannot be a one-to-one relationship with the non-objectifiable. This is what Rudolph Bultmann threw in the face of Barth, and with it (correctly) disqualified his total *Church Dogmatics*., even if he did not acknowledge, or even recognize, that it equally

on Scripture," in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 413-446, esp. 438-446. For the parallel structure in Heidegger and Barth, see S. U. Zuidema, "The Idea of Revelation with Karl Barth and with Martin Heidegger: The Comparability of their Patterns of Thought," *Free University Quarterly* 4 (1955), 71-84; also published in the original Dutch Language, "De Openbaringsideeen van Karl Barth en Marin Heidegger," in *Philosophia Reformata* (February 20, 1955), Vol. 20: Issue 1-4, 162-175. In a perceptive fashion he shows that Barth's "god" and Heidegger's "Being" are both wedded to the same concept of "revelment in concealment" and "concealment in revelation." The "revelment" prompts them to write their "theology" (Barth) or "philosophy" (Heidegger). The "concealment" immediately disqualifies their writings. What is behind this, as we saw already, is their commitment to Kantian Particularity as their "Ultimate," however it is dressed up "theologically" or philosophically." In both instances what they must, if not "doomed" to come up with are no more than contentless, and so meaningless "ciphers." Brute Particularity, when allowed to reign supremely, cannot but dismiss "whatever" Universality at every turn of the theological or philosophical road. Heidegger understood this from beginning to end. His followers, whether philosophical or theological, either did not "get it," or did not *want* to get it, out of despair (?) for a (the?) Camus-like alternative. After all, Heidegger was their "lifeline," "empty, deceitful, and all." Barth most like missed it. So did his theological followers who clung to *their* "lifeline," in the final analysis, as Zuidema shows, in an equally "vacuous, fraudulent, and all" fashion. See also **CHECK** Trinity," in Paul Louis Metzger, ed., *Trinitarian Soundings* (London: T&T International, 2006), 63-71. Both Kamphuis and Gunton agree with Barth that no justice can be done to any of God's perfections apart from his Eternal Triunity. But they part decisive company on the content, if not "quality" of Barth's "trinity." Gunton buys into it in full. Kamphuis, apparently in total agreement with Zuidema's critique, shows how divergent it is from Scripture, in fact, poles apart from it.

³⁷⁹ See for this Kamphuis, 32-36, as well.

disqualified his own “theology” that was embodied and reduced to one concept, The Christ Event.” Water and fire simply do not mix. This is the obstacle that turns, among others, both the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the theology of Karl Barth into radical and total impossibilities. The language that they use consists of no more than an aggregate of empty “ciphers” that call for an immediate replacement in a tragic ever-ongoing Sisyphus process. Heidegger fought this battle throughout his life and admitted the emptiness of all his written and spoken verbiage, unable to transcend whatever he put on paper, when he states in his lecture “Time and Being,” reflecting upon essentially his total oeuvre, that “Er hat nur in Aussagesätzen gesprochen.” This is, that “He had only spoken in objectifying sentences,” which for this very reason did not, does not, and cannot close in on the non-objectifying and non-objectifiable, let alone once and for all establish this. In other words, it is impossible for verbalized (objectifying) universality to catch brute non-verbalizable (non-objectifiable) particularity. In short, with this he conceded that his life’s work, however erudite and profound, constituted no more than a series of inauthentic, non-binding assertions. He admittedly never stopped trying to step over his own shadow and just as admittedly never succeeded in doing so. Every similar new effort suffered the same tragic fate. The structure of Barth’s theology runs parallel to the philosophy of Heidegger. I am not sure whether Barth ever “got it.” His followers clearly never did. Otherwise, they would not have sought to resuscitate him. For a detailed treatment of Heidegger’s philosophy, see Henry Krabbendam, *From Bultmann to Ott*, an unpublished Doctor’s Thesis, available in the Library of Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia, PA (1968), esp. 284. For a (partial) analysis of Barth’s theology, see the relevant sections in Henry Krabbendam, “B.B. Warfield versus G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture,” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 413-446, esp. 438-446. For the parallel structure in Heidegger and Barth, see S. U. Zuidema, “The Idea of Revelation with Karl Barth and with Martin Heidegger: The Comparability of their Patterns of Thought,” *Free University Quarterly* 4 (1955), 71-84; also published in the original Dutch Language, “De Openbaringsideeen van Karl Barth en Marin Heidegger,” in *Philosophia Reformata* (February 20, 1955), Vol. 20: Issue 1-4, 162-175. In a perceptive fashion he shows that Barth’s “god” and Heidegger’s “Being” are both wedded to the same concept of “revelment in concealment” and “concealment in revelation.” The “revelment” prompts them to write their “theology” (Barth) or “philosophy” (Heidegger). The “concealment” immediately disqualifies their writings. What is behind this, as we saw already, is their commitment to Kantian Particularity as their “Ultimate,” however it is dressed up “theologically” or philosophically.” In both instances what they must, if not “doomed” to come up with are no more than contentless, and so meaningless “ciphers.” Brute Particularity, when allowed to reign supremely, cannot but dismiss “whatever” Universality at every turn of the theological or philosophical road. Heidegger understood this from beginning to end. His followers, whether philosophical or theological, either did not “get it,” or did not want to get it, out of despair (?) for a (the?) Camus-like alternative. After all, Heidegger was their “lifeline,” “empty, deceitful, and all.” Barth most like missed it. So did his theological followers who clung to their “lifeline,” in the final analysis, as Zuidema shows, equally “vacuous, fraudulent, and all.”

Incidentally, too many folks have been fooled by his “packaging.” Today’s multiple attempts to rehabilitate him is an utterly regrettable case in point. Contentless food stuffs cannot feed anyone. This applies to spiritual food as well as to physical one. At any rate, shearing his “godhead” of any and all universality this allowed him, in actual fact and more precisely, this forced him to attribute to his “godhead” “what he billed as a “holy mutability.”

Spotlight XIV

Karl Barth: “Holy Mutability”

See for this Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, A.G., 1946), II/1, 557. For the English translation, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1967), II/1, 496,

“There is such a thing as the ‘holy mutability’ of God. He is above all ages. But above them as their Lord ... and therefore as the One who ... *partakes* in their alteration.” As both Dolezal, 29-30 and Kamphuis, 35-36, did observe as well, Barth immediately “defines” the “phenomenon” which he earmarked with the phrase “holy mutability” further as “constancy” (Bestandigkeit). Therefore, “there is something corresponding to that alteration in his own essence. His constancy consists in the fact that He is always the same in every change” (KD, II/1, 557; CD, II/1, 496). With this, he essentially advocates an “immutable mutability.” This sounds very much like a logical contradiction. However, while the “constancy” terminology may give the impression that Barth plays with words, or is involved in a sleight of hand, in reality there is more, much more than meets the eye, something that seemed to have escaped Dolezal as well as Kamphuis. If they had diagnosed this, they might (could) well have adjusted their own view somewhat (Dolezal) or added some necessary substance to it (Kamphuis). Frankly, what we notice in Barth is similar, if not identical to what we encounter in post-modernity when it virtually “exclaims” that the absence of absolute truth is the only absolute truth. Apologists regularly and rather “triumphantly” declare this to be a self-contradiction and argue that this should make post-modernity stop dead in its tracks on the face of it. But in the real world this appears to be a puzzling pipedream. Candidly, it fails to recognize the engrained and ultimately “religious” root of post-modernity. This is a radical and total commitment to the ultimacy of particularity. It excludes universality by definition and with this absolute truth as well. To declare this to be the absolute truth reveals the dark apostate heart that in its blindness is more than willing to swallow the glossed over (unnoticed and unnoticeable?) self-contradiction without even batting an eye. This, of course, can only be remedied by the Gospel that promises a heart transplant (Ezek. 36:26) and issues a summons to repentance (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 17:30). This can never, repeat, never, be “cured” by logical argumentation, however cogent it may be or seem, whether of the pre-evangelistic evidential sort, or the non-evangelistic presuppositional, or neo-presuppositional type. See also the next Footnote for this. At any rate, in Barth we encounter a similar scenario. In true post-Kantian fashion, he is equally committed to the ultimacy of the Particular in his “analogy of history” in which the Kantian heaven is perpetuated in the unbridgeable chasm between “Historie,” every-day, ordinary history, and *Geschichte*, a characteristic of a supposed, but non-existing brutally particular “upper realm.” Hence biblical immutability is a no-no by definition. But the universality of the rule of the Particular is a “sacred” (cow!) and (therefore) a “constant” reality. Hence the mutability inherent to Particularity is a “holy” mutability. The term “constancy” is designed to bring out the unimpeded nature and ultimately the supposedly adorable quality of the changeless essence of particularity that makes mutability forever inescapable. The adjective “holy” betrays the “religious” condition and commitment of the heart. As the next footnote explains as well, in all this Barth is victimized by, if not imprisoned in a fundamental and self-destructive (Satan-applauded as well as frustrating) dialectic that inevitably emerges upon a rebellious apostasy from the Triune God of Scripture, whether in apostate substance or in apostate method. Most likely this assessment was never brought to Barth’s attention. So, he may never have realized the exact nature of the mire that imprisoned him. For the latter, see Footnotes 378 as well. See also Long, PSTG, 307-362, for the unmistakable broadly philosophical backdrop of and influence upon Barth’s theology. This should be an eye-opener!

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Candidly, this is the peak of an enormous iceberg that must be located, analyzed and assessed if we wish to get to the bottom of Barth’s theo-ontology, which has done unspeakable damage to an often gullible Church. When the *New Covenant Gospel* with its focus upon regeneration, justification and sanctification (Ezek. 36:25, 26, 27), showing the *historical* transition from wrath to grace, is vitiated, how can an evangelistic ministry survive (Mt. 28:19)? Furthermore, when Scripture as the *inerrant Word of God* is shown the door, what is left of an edificational ministry (Mt. 28:20)? The title of an incisive critique of Barth’s theo-ontology, *Christianity and Barthianism*, which places the latter outside the pale of Christianity, speaks volumes “Brute particularity” marked by unfettered “freedom” that is not and cannot be restrained by anything external, or internal for that matter, has no other option, if not escape route! It cannot possibly agree to an established New Covenant Gospel or to a fixed inerrant Word of God.

Spotlight XV

The Fundamental Dialectic

As I explain in my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, especially 87ff, rebel mankind that apostatizes from the Triune God is, by definition, victimized by a fundamental dialectic in which, and here is the rub, the universality and particularity poles simultaneously presuppose and exclude each other. It endlessly seeks to synthesize them in all areas and aspects of life, whether in philosophy (Ancient and Modern Western Philosophy), theoretical physics (Stephen Hawking), or in all areas, such as, family, business, government, and aspects, such as politics, economics, of life, but it never succeeds. Its history is a perpetual Sisyphus syndrome (read: *sin-drome*). In this context remember first the hopefully unforgettable assessment of both Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I, 1, 36, 39, 40, 56, 57, 65, 76, and esp. 93-97, and many others that all of the history of philosophy is one great effort or an endless string of efforts to solve the one (universality)-and-many (particularity) problem, and second that this history is one great failure or an endless string of failures. At any rate the remarkable fact is that the practitioners of philosophy as well as mankind in general, whether in their thinking, willing or feeling, always tilt toward universality at the expense of particularity or toward particularity at the expense of universality, either more mildly or more radically. Unless checked by repentance, it invariably did, does, or will capsize and self-destroy. Universality tends to be tyrannical at the expense of freedom and particularity leans to license at the expense of order. Only repentance with a view to forgiveness and godliness can sanitize this. Restricting me to the present issue, Ancient Western philosophy puts its eggs by and large in the basket of rationalistic universality and Modern Western Philosophy in the basket of irrationalist particularity. The two poles presuppose each other in God's creation, which in its created one-and-many spheres reflect the uncreated being of the Triune God, in whom universality and particularity are at perfect peace and in perfect harmony. But for anyone and anything rebellious they simultaneously turn into sworn enemies, never to be synthesized by rebel minds, wills, or emotions despite the ever-repeated attempts. The history of mankind is a history of wreckages however imposing the edifices may have been that were constructed. They were promptly demolished by its successors. Now, it is a well-known fact that theology, whether as a rebellious calamity or a misguided tragedy routinely threw in its lot with apostate philosophy. The end-product was invariably calamitous or tragic. When it was enamored by Ancient Philosophy it embraced universality and opined, in fact, could not but opine that the (then prevailing) "god-idea" necessarily implied immutability (Bavinck in a regrettable unguarded moment). When it began to cuddle up to the tenets of Modern Philosophy, it fell in the arms of particularity, and promptly decided that the (newly predominating) "god-idea" demanded mutability (Barth in a calamitous, deliberate choice). In each instance autonomous thinking ("het denken") ruled the roost and had the deciding word. It now should go without saying that repentance is unavoidable to the rebel as well as to the misguided mind to prevent or cure calamity or tragedy!

Incidentally (?), it has recently come to light that Barth had a decades' long mistress. His devotees have argued that this *faux-pas* does not imply that therefore his "theology," as espoused in his voluminous *Church Dogmatics*, needs to be disqualified. Be this as it may, it is also very well possible that his theology with its animus against, in fact, "animosity" toward anything "universal" and its embrace of unrestrained and unrestrainable freedom, incidentally, dressed up as a freedom of "love" to make it more deceptively palatable, paved the way for this *faux-pas* to occur, which, not so incidentally according to Scripture (let me say this with all possible caution) rules out entrance into God's Kingdom (Rev. 21:8; 22:15). The all-encompassing victimizing "lordship" (read: tyranny) of "brute particularity" simply cannot tolerate a universally inerrant Scripture, including a universal Decalogue. So, this does and should lead to the utterly compassionate observation that Barth through his own making found himself between a rock, an inerrant Scripture (Decalogue) that refuses to be intimidated and step aside, and a hard place, a theology that cannot stomach such Scripture (Decalogue). Spine-chilling, indeed! Even more so, once it is understood that Barth's theology does not allow for a much needed, in fact, an indispensable *historical* heart transplant in regeneration that is experiential and recognizable by its fruit (John 3:8)! It is an ominous reality that just as there is no observable trajectory of physical life without physical birth, so there is no observable spiritual trajectory without spiritual birth. When the physical heart does not "beat" or "pump," death prevails. If the spiritual heart does not follow suit, the same result. In both instances there is death in the pot. In a word, good ideas should have good

consequences. But bad ideas certainly cannot escape bad consequences. These are always regrettable, if not tragic, and at times calamitous. This calls for constant vigilance.

Second, Nicholas Wolterstorff. In quite a different, but nevertheless very real sense he is not too far behind. He starts out by rejecting the simplicity of God, which he regards as the lynchpin culprit of the misconstrued and unacceptable Thomistic theo-ontology. This does and must have a domino effect. The closely attendant attributes, such as immutability as well as impassibility, eternity, and even aseity go by the board as well. Concretely, he construes God as “everlasting,” rather than “eternal,” and therewith seeks to posit him as essentially temporal and so mutable, subject to change.³⁸⁰ Therefore, he cannot even expect to receive an audience among Immutabilists. Nor *vice versa*, of course. They are truly poles-apart! While the one may call the other irretrievably (?) dead, the other may well call the one irretrievably (?) heretical. Is it possible that to one degree or another both may be calling the pot black? We will have to wait and see. At any rate, Wolterstorff marshals a fair number of philosophical as well as biblical arguments to flesh out his views. He does so from an Analytic Philosophical point of view. Someone wrote, while “the Continental philosophy,” which incidentally puts its stamp on Barth, “tends to be obscure, imprecise and emotive, analytic philosophy lays great worth and emphasis on clarity of definitions, careful delineations of premises and logical rigor of argumentation. Unfortunately, theology has for a long time learned to follow the lead of Continental philosophy, which tends to result in darkness piled upon darkness.” Wolterstorff adds, “Never since the late Middle Ages has philosophical theology so flourished as in the last thirty years ... this flourishing has occurred within the analytic tradition of philosophy.”³⁸¹ So, here we go.

To start with, he tells us, “I have serious questions about various parts of Christian philosophical theology in most of its classic formulations, including its classic Thomistic formulation. I do not believe that God is simple, ontologically immutable, eternal in the sense of being outside time, or impassible” ... “If simplicity, eternity, ontological immutability, and impassibility all have to go, then aseity also has to go.” He disagrees with the claim that God’s having the properties God does have is never dependent on anything other than God.” By way of example, if God is wronged or disturbed by us, he undergoes change, and when he permits us to wrong him, he “chose to be passible, thereby also choosing to give up aseity.”³⁸² He also tells us that “to understand the doctrine (of simplicity), we must realize that it was formulated in the context of Aristotelian ontology. The fundamental strategy of Aristotelian ontology is to analyze entities into their components, form, matter, essence, existence, properties, qualities, definitions, accidents, and so forth. The doctrine of divine simplicity is that God is devoid of ontological components. God has no constituents, none at all! In God

³⁸⁰ See for this Wolterstorff, IG, 14, 91, 108.

³⁸¹ See for these quotations from William Lane Craig and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Long, PSTG, 221. To counter balance them PSTG, 221-222, adds to this the judgments of Eleanore Stump, “The Analytic approach, left to itself because it values intricate, technically expert argument, has a tendency to focus more and more upon less and less, and so, at its worst, it can become plodding, pedestrian, sterile, and inadequate to its task” and David Hart, “The questions of transcendence and immanence, the meaning of being, time and eternity ... remain the essential matters of Continental thought.” All in all, according to Long, PSTG, 223, 268, analytic philosophy has not come up with any kind of consensus regarding the Doctrine of God other than the agreement that Thomism is more or less “coherent, or illogical and cannot be sustained” as is! This lack of agreement among its practitioners produced “confusion” rather “clarity.”

³⁸² Wolterstorff, IG, 12, 15-16.

there is no distinction between God and God's essence, nor any between God's essence and God's existence, nor any between God's essence and God's properties - and so forth, for whatever ontological distinctions there might be."³⁸³

Incidentally, I do not present this quotation in order with Wolterstorff to disparage the doctrine of Divine simplicity. But it is to point out how easy it is to fall victim to defending the metaphysics of the God of Scripture with the metaphysics of a pagan philosopher whose metaphysics is designed to destroy the metaphysics of the God of Scripture. Just like eating meat from the physical table of (non-existing) idols is to eat from the table of demons (1 Cor. 10:21), so to participate in the mental "spread" of apostate (empty and deceitful) philosophers that (seek to) suppress (and destroy) the Triune God of Scripture may well be to participate in the "spread" of demons. Simplicity is a biblical doctrine, or it is not. If it is, the challenge is to show it from and define it in terms of total Scripture as the sole *principium cognoscendi* of Christian Doctrine. Don't add anything to it and don't take anything away from it. One thing is sure, pagan philosophy is never content to be merely a so-called "handmaiden." It insists on taking control. This is the nature of "the beast." Lord, have mercy on all of us!

Further, Wolterstorff virtually and properly declares Kant's system bankrupt since it denies the knowability of the transcendent. Therefore, when it casts its long shadow upon the theological enterprise, its premises make this enterprise "look impossible." After all, it cannot "get God in mind," which excludes even "the feasibility of thinking and speaking" about him." "On Kant's terms faith and even the term 'God' suffer the same fate." Not so incidentally, this the sorry legacy that we also encounter in the theology of Karl Barth (identical in structure to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger). In fact, the word "sorry" can hardly touch it. We are told, "The (Kant-produced) inability to gain knowledge of God is menacing to (read: devastating for) all Christian doctrine and practice."³⁸⁴ That this judgment of Wolterstorff does and must apply to Barth as well stands to eminent reason.

³⁸³ Wolterstorff, IG, 39-40.

³⁸⁴ This is not to ignore that Kant puts a leash on "knowledge" in order "to make room for faith." In other words, it is curtailed to the experienced (universality of the) "phenomenal" world to open up a vista upon the (particularity of the) "noumenal" one. This is the explicit objective of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Neither is it to overlook that the faith that corresponds, in fact, is correlative with the noumenal world is a "rational" faith. Otherwise his *Critique of Practical Reason* could never have been written. Nor is it to exclude any "god-thought" and "god-talk." But the Kantian "god" is a boundary concept. No knowledge (or language) allowed beyond the limit that is placed upon it. That is, no passport to cross it. So how can we avoid the conclusion that it is and must remain contentless, let alone that it is contentless vis-à-vis Scripture? To spin on Kant's so-called "religion" of "rational faith" some more, it apparently eyes the *Summum Bonum*, which is "salvation in the domain of morality." However, this "religion" seems to be "riddled with irrationalities." For all this, see also Wolterstorff, IG, 42-55 as well as 56-67, esp. 61, 63, 64. Candidly, "to leash 'knowledge' to make room for 'faith'" sounds innocent, if not appealing. But it should not be forgotten that what drives Kant is the fundamental apostate dialectic that "haunts" him to synthesize the contrastive poles of universality (rational "order") and particularity (non-rational, if not irrational "freedom") which mutually and simultaneously presuppose and exclude each other. Universality simply *must* be curtailed for particularity (and with it their mutual presupposition) to have a "chance." But they can *never* mix (which exhibits their mutual exclusion). This means that however particularity is "dressed up," it is non-rational, if not irrational. There goes an Inerrant Scripture, the Triune God, faith, regeneration, justification, sanctification (despite his emphasis upon his so-called "moral imperative") and for that matter any language, since all language is, by definition, universal in its predication. Kant left Heidegger in his philosophy and Barth in his theology in his tragic wake. Once again, if Kant, and all his followers, had been able to make a compelling case, which they failed to do, the Christianity of Scripture with all that this biblically entails, would have been a figment of someone's imagination. It is interesting to note that in the heyday

The parallel with the Medieval and Modern theological enterprise, leaning on Aristotle and Kant respectively is uncannily telling. In Aristotelian (Thomist) theology the Being and Perfections of God are “essentially” out of bounds. Simplicity dictates this. Component-less Being cannot possibly be approached, let alone grasped, by component-full being, including component-full language. Hence the emphasis upon “analogy.” Simplicity demands this. In Kantian (Barthian) theology all God-thought and God-talk (theological discourse) are out of bounds. Immutable (that is, radical) mutability requires this.³⁸⁵

All this underscores why Paul calls the total philosophical enterprise based upon “human traditions” a “vain deception” (Col. 2:8), whether explicitly of the Ancient or implicitly of the Modern variety. None of its apostate practitioners are able to solve the universality-particularity problem which ironically never was a problem until their apostasy turned it into one. Whether in Ancient Western Philosophy or Modern Western Philosophy, the Transcendent, whatever it is called, the One, the Source, or even “God,” that towers over reality is now, by definition, unknowable. In Ancient Philosophy the Absolute Universal cannot reveal itself to particularity and in Modern Philosophy the Absolute Particular cannot be grasped by universality. The unbridgeable rift is admittedly in evidence in all the philosophical icons, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus in ancient and Kant, Hegel and Heidegger in modern philosophy.³⁸⁶ So, we should ask, why use their failing tools to establish the unestablishable in order to give a firm footing to the God of Scripture? That is, to the Triune God of Scripture, the Uncreated One-and-Many! In him universality (*De Deo Uno*) and particularity (*De Deo Trino*) exist in perfect harmony and peace, which finds its metaphysical reflection in the ubiquitous created one and many spheres to be understood epistemologically by turning to and treasuring his inerrant Word in Scripture and to be lived out ethically in

of the influence of Barth, with his enormous Church Dogmatics, and Bultmann, with his rather meager, in comparison, existential Christ-event, an erudite Conference was organized by their followers to determine whether the term “God” could still be retained. After all, was not all language disqualified from beginning to end? The mere fact of such Conference with such “topic” already speaks volumes! As we saw, Heidegger did not need a Conference of that kind. He, at least, was honest enough royally to concede that whatever language he used was already “under the bus” before he even did or could throw it there! He conceded this in both phases of his philosophy. In fact, the admitted failure of Phase I was a kind of wake-up call, and precipitated the construction of his equally failing Phase II.

³⁸⁵ Wolterstorff, IG, 35-67, esp. 49, 50, 52.

³⁸⁶ For Modern Philosophy, see Stephen Mulhall, “‘The Presentation of the Infinite in the Finite:’ The Place of God in Post-Kantian Philosophy,” in Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 494ff. “The One and Many Problem” and “The Transcendence-Immanence conundrum” that haunted Ancient Philosophy are equally alive, and to be solved and settled in Modern Philosophy! The author argues for all practical purposes that the “success” of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy would have the demise, in fact, impossibility of the Christian God as its inevitable corollary. Paul’s “x-ray vision” of the apostate philosophical enterprise as “empty deceit” becomes increasingly intelligible and pertinent! Kant called the “expression” of the “inexpressible” as essentially an “inexpressible expression,” “The Scandal of Philosophy” due to its utterly frustrating failure “to step over its own shadow.” See for this, Herman Philipse, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in OHCP, 334-378, esp. 355, 376. He basically argues that all those luminaries, such as, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger have been found wanting in their efforts to remove this scandal. Once the contrastive view of reality is embraced, which inevitably results from rebellious apostasy from God, all efforts to synthesize suffer shipwreck. These will just as inevitably turn into a Sisyphus undertaking, even if Sisyphus historically turns into a multi-personality, unless and until God grants a heart-transplant in regeneration and thereby replaces man’s life-mission control center. That this requires a *Gospel* Message, and a *Gospel* Apologetics does and should go without saying. Any Message or Apologetic method that seeks man’s agreement, whether mental or otherwise, is *qua* method DOA. If it shows signs of pursuing “artificial” life only, why not send it to the “execution chamber?” This is not a pedantic statement. There is way too much at stake, as the apologetics of Jesus, Stephen, Peter and Paul forcefully convey at every turn.

harmony and peace by being God-like obedient to it. All philosophical “handmaidens” are a far cry compared to this and so is every theo-ontology that listens to their Siren Song.

Third, he addresses the Thomist concepts of analogy and analogical predication. There is no doubt that according to Aquinas “it is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures.” He “never fails to make clear, when discussing this issue, that the doctrine of simplicity is what forces him to deny univocity.” Not just immateriality or a-temporality (apparently many philosophers) or to “otherness” (apparently many theologians)! Divine simplicity, in which all God’s attributes are identical (“found in an absolutely simple way”), and human complexity, in which all these attributes are distinguished and remain distinguishable (“having them in a divided way”), simply do not mix.³⁸⁷

But here, by way of an aside, Wolterstorff and other Aquinas’ scholars part company. The latter hold that the rejection of univocity pertains to all possible predicates, such as, goodness love, grace, mercy, holiness, justice, etc., etc. But this does not add up to “equivocity” “All predications are analogous. Equivocal, yes; but the equivocation of analogy.”³⁸⁸ Wolterstorff, however, in a carefully and intricately constructed essay, argues that the denial of univocity does not pertain to the *predicates*, but to the different modes in which God and man address these predicates, that is, to the *predicating*. In short, there is no “rift” in the predicate *terminology*, but rather in the predicate *allocution* (manner of address), in the *illocutionary act of speaking*. This, of course, thickens the plot. Would this allow for univocity of some sort, even in Aquinas? This definitely would spike the view of theologians who contend that “no terms apply literally to God,” or “that predicate terms that apply to God never have the same sense as those that apply to creatures.”³⁸⁹ Virtually all of them tell us, “Similar, YES, however this ends up. The same, NO.” Wolterstorff takes issue with this. Terminological *identity*- predication, “YES.” This would imply “univocity.” Identical predicate-*allocution*, “NO.” Candidly, the jury may well be out about this imaginative and intriguing Aquinas’ interpretation, which for all practical purposes flies in the face of the universal (?) customary assessment. So, I will leave it alone, at least for the time being.

Fourth, Wolterstorff dedicates four essays to support his twofold thesis that God (1) is temporal and therefore mutable, versus a-temporally eternal and ontologically immutable and (2) displays joyful and suffering love versus exhibiting non-suffering apathy and unperturbed bliss.

I can summarize his argumentation under two headings, the biblical argument and the philosophical one. The (shorter) biblical one is said to lay the foundation for his views and the (larger) philosophical one provides a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.³⁹⁰

First, Wolterstorff goes by the hermeneutical principle that Scripture must be taken literally unless there are persuasive counter indicators. [This is identical to Augustine’s canonical contention that the literal meaning does and must prevail unless it derails a “life of purity or soundness of doctrine.”]³⁹¹ On this basis he arrives at the following three conclusions.

³⁸⁷ IG, 120.

³⁸⁸ IG, 121-122.

³⁸⁹ IG, 112-132, esp. 119, 122 (about the possibility of univocity), 125, 127, 129-130,

³⁹⁰ IG, 164.

³⁹¹ IG, 158-159.

(1) Scripture presents us with many narratives of God having a history (!) of speaking and responding as well as of acting and reacting, such as in Exodus 3-4. This, therefore, does and must imply that God is temporal and mutable,³⁹² apparently “by good and necessary consequence.”

(2) It is agreed that Scripture concretely addresses the issues at hand, be it in a small number of passages only. Malachi 3:6 and James 1:18 supposedly convey Divine Immutability, covering the total Being of God, including all his attributes. Further, Psalm 90:1-4 and Psalm 102:27 allegedly convey Divine eternity, to be defined as a-temporal, having “no temporal-order relationship” to any possible event and no “time-strand” that reflects such relationship!³⁹³ However, Wolterstorff contests the propriety of these interpretations. He argues that the passages under consideration should not be ontologized, as if they convey an ontological immutability and an ontological a-temporality. In a word, nothing could be farther from the truth than that what is conveyed in them. According to Malachi 3:16, God is unchanging in his fidelity to his covenant, and according to James 1:17 he is an unconditional and unalterable source of light and goodness. Ontological immutability is not even on the horizon in Malachi and less than likely in James. So, neither can be used as “proof texts” for it. Further, according to Psalm 90:1-4 there is an unfathomable contrast between God who existed prior to his creation and is from everlasting to everlasting and mere fleeting mortals, and according to Psalm 102:27 there is an equal contrast between the everlasting God and his transitory creation. Neither one of these two passages support divine timelessness.³⁹⁴ In the light of all this the “burden of proof” rests squarely upon the shoulder of the ontological Immutabilists. They may not and should not be allowed to turn the tables.³⁹⁵

(3) Regarding so-called Impassibility, he writes, “I come to this conclusion: the fact that the biblical writers speak of God as rejoicing and suffering over the state of his creation is not a superficial eliminable feature of their speech. It expresses themes deeply embedded in the biblical vision. God’s love for the world is a rejoicing and suffering love. The picture of God as a Stoic sage, ever blissful and non-suffering is in deep conflict with the biblical picture.”³⁹⁶ In other words, for him to “sanitize” this deeply “moving” picture with reference to a type and use of language that is merely anthropomorphic, anthropopathic or metaphorical, such as found in Aquinas’ footsteps, simply will not do.³⁹⁷

Second, the enriched philosophical argument is more intricate. We read, “in the case of certain of God’s actions the (past-present-future) temporality of the event that God acts on infects God’s own action with temporality.”³⁹⁸ Also, as described in Scripture, the account of God’s knowledge processes, God’s memory instances, and God’s planning history has temporality and mutability indelibly stamped upon them. “It seems to me that (to deny this) is clearly (?) to give up the notion of God as a redeeming God, and in turn it seems to me that

³⁹² IG, 157-158.

³⁹³ IG, 137, 153-155, 160-161.

³⁹⁴ IG, 153-154, 160-163. The passages, John 8:58 and 2 Pet. 3:8, are not of much help either. As to the former, “If the I AM existed before Abraham how could the I AM be timeless?” As to the latter, “If God is described in temporal language, it amazes one that this passage should ever have been cited in support of timelessness.” In short, “experiential duration” must “match up with clock time!”

³⁹⁵ IG, 159-160, 179.

³⁹⁶ IG, 219

³⁹⁷ IG, 225

³⁹⁸ IG, 150. See also 175-176.

to give this is to give up what is central to the biblical vision of God.”³⁹⁹ On the other hand, if not vice versa, “By seeing that God’s temporality is presupposed by the temporality of God as redeemer we too have reached the conclusion that we share time with God.”⁴⁰⁰

The conclusion of his intricate reasoning process could well take one’s breath away. Any “event of *my referring to X* is a temporal event ... Now the event of *my referring to X* is identical with the event of *X’s being referred to by me*. And this event is an aspect both of *X* and of *me*. So, if *X* is a being that lasts longer than my act of referring to *X* does, then for a while *X* has this aspect and for a while not. And thus, *X* would have *succession* on its time-strand. And so, *X* would not be eternal. Thus, if God were eternal no human being could ever refer to God - or perform any temporal act with respect to God. If God were eternal, one could not know God. In particular, one could not know that God was eternal, or even that God was. Indeed, if God were eternal, one could not predicate of God that God is eternal. For predicating is also a temporal act. So, this is the calamitous consequence of claiming of God that God is eternal: if one predicates of God that God is eternal then God is not.”⁴⁰¹

The dual bottom line?

For a starter, we are thrown a gauntlet. “The arguments for ontological immutability come down to three. (1) Mutability is incompatible with God’s simplicity, which in turn is grounded in aseity. (2) Mutability is incompatible with God’s supreme excellence. (3) Mutability would blur the distinction between Creator and creature.”⁴⁰² To the Immutabilists belongs the threefold burden of proof to establish all this. According to Wolterstorff, they clearly have not delivered!

Further, we are presented with a heart warmer of sorts. “Though God is within time, yet God is Lord of time. God is Lord of what occurs. And that grounds all authentically biblical worship of, and obedience to, God ... Not because God is outside time – eternal, immutable, impassive - ... but because what God can and does bring about within time that we mortals are to render God praise and obedience.”⁴⁰³ Of course, Immutabilists must make the latter their Grand Obsession as well.

Third, recently a spade of scholars, of whom I mention only three, although not willing to be as radical as Wolterstorff, hold to God’s intrinsic essential immutability, all right. But only prior to his creation of the Universe that came with time and space. From that very moment onward, however, he added or acquired the properties of “temporality” and therefore “mutability” to the arsenal of his attributes as either *necessary* to be able to communicate with his creatures or as *conducive* for its facilitation. I venture to guess that this was more a matter of “intuition” than the result of a well-reasoned and clearly articulated rejection of the vaunted and monumental theo-ontological edifice of which Divine Immutability was only one aspect. Understandably averse to “equivocity” and just as

³⁹⁹ IG, 152.

⁴⁰⁰ IG, 156.

⁴⁰¹ IG, 153.

⁴⁰² IG, 180-181. It supposedly may not be too difficult to detect the contours of Greek Being-theology looming large behind it, Plato? Aristotle? Plotinus? All, of the above? See for this, IG, 134-135. At any rate, compare, IG, 135, “Every attempt to purge Christian theology of the incompatible Hellenic patterns of thought must fail unless it removes the roadblock of the God-eternal tradition” with the milder version in IG, 179. The third “argument” does and should pique our interest since it is foundational to the thinking of the apologist, Cornelius Van Til. It has been a (perennial?) question whether his metaphysical Creator-creature distinction trumped the epistemological priority, if not primacy of the *Sola Scriptura* as the ultimate *principium cognoscendi*. Wolterstorff certainly would say so.

⁴⁰³ IG, 156.

understandably unclear about the murky concept of “analogy,” they either inferred philosophically that a “univocity” of sorts was unavoidable or concluded theologically that the unmistakable presence of a time-strand in God’s speaking to, acting regarding, and interacting with creature man required a temporality and mutability (of sorts), or were motivated to go that route by a combination of philosophical and theological reasoning. At any rate, of the three to be mentioned here, Bruce Ware called the added properties of temporality and mutability “relational,”⁴⁰⁴ John Frame, “historical,”⁴⁰⁵ and Scott Oliphint

⁴⁰⁴ See Bruce A. Ware, “An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 29 (December 1986), 433ff. God’s involvement with creation apparently gave rise to “innumerable changes both on the part of God and on the part of his creatures.” While he fully retained his ontological immutability (his essential nature) and his ethical immutability (his avowed promises), he complemented this with his interactive or relational mutability.

⁴⁰⁵ See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2002), 208-209, 229, 558-559, 570-572. Apparently, we should not be fearful to assert that “some of our language about God is univocal or literal,” of course, when it is biblical language. After all, this is the language in which God has revealed himself to us. Further, there is no doubt that God is and remains “unchangeable in his a-temporal and supra-temporal existence.” Nevertheless as “an agent in history,” that is, “as an agent in time,” he is simultaneously a “temporal” as well as a “changing” being. In short, he leads a “dual existence.” See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 13-18, for the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God, 18-40, for the knowability and incomprehensibility of God, and 257-258, for “apparent contradictions.” As I explain below, in all these areas the issue of the complementarity of truth plays a fundamental role. Failure to recognize this, to embrace it and to have the functioning and operation of one’s heart, mind, will, emotions, morality, social interaction, creative imagination, speaking and acting to be determined by it, is a blueprint for disaster, whether in whole or in part, temporary or permanently, temporally, or eternally. The latter is dependent upon and follows the degree to which and the extent in which the complementarity of truth is honored. In his more recent volume, John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 362-367, 362-377, esp. 367, on “Scripture on God and Time,” “God’s Temporal Omni-presence,” and his “Unchangeability,” he seems to be more careful. In these sections he maintains God’s a-temporal eternity *before* creation, his supra-temporal omnipresent eternity *after* creation as well as his a-temporal omnipresent eternity *in* temporal creation. In short, even in his a-temporality God speaks and acts in time. He does so covenantally, covenant taken as a non-equal, a non-parity, a sovereign-subject, a Lordship-servanthood, bond-relationship with laws, promises, as well as inter-spoken and inter-acting sanctions and all. Still, he states, seemingly in passing as a kind of after-thought, “So, God is temporal,” be it not “merely temporal.” Frankly, this is not a consequential, let alone necessary conclusion. Beyond this, it is a jarring conclusion in its context. He would have done much better to have left this “conclusion” unwritten. The *what* of the eternal God inter-speaking and inter-acting in time is as clear as the clearest day, but the *how* is as dark as the darkest night. So, a “mere” and “cheerful” reference to the incomprehensible complementarity of truth would have done quite well. In fact, this is *mandated* (Deut. 29:29) and therefore should have been spelled out and made clear from the very start. Frame “hints” at this complementarity of truth from time to time, such as in his treatment of Supra- and Infra-lapsarianism, in his handling of the relationship of Divine Transcendence and Immanence, and in his references to the relationship of Universality and Particularity. He avers that the poles of Divine Sovereignty, emphasized by the Supras to show the harmony of God’s plan, even if it includes the Fall, and of Human Responsibility, stressed by the Infras to show the horror of rebellion, even if it is part of God’s plan, can (must!) be taken into account simultaneously. So, No Conflict! And then this statement, “Our present need is not to debate these positions as if they were alternatives but to ask God to cure the discomforts that create questions and to deal with our hearts” (ST, 228; see also, 180-182, which touch upon the doctrine of Divine and human “concurrence” as on display in Gen. 50:20; Ps. 105:17; and Acts 4:27-28). He asserts the same about the two poles in the other two contexts (ST, 39-48; 414; 701-702; and 508-510, respectively). Again, no conflict! However, in the present context “conflict,” because some apparent conundrums may be explainable, sooner, later, or not at all. These (“suddenly?”) include “sovereignty/human freedom, the problem of evil and the Trinity.” They are not necessarily “‘apparent contradictions’ that can never be reconciled by the finite human mind (versus Cornelius Van Til).” (ST, 332). All this is a little murky. He should have simply stated that the type of complementarity in the present context does and must appear or even be contradictory, by definition, to the finite and therefore limited human mind. But what if he would have further

“covenantal.”⁴⁰⁶ It must be assumed that all three were or are understandably driven by the desire to do justice to all the biblical data, especially the data that others may seem to overlook, ignore, oppose, warp, reject or even combat.

But it drew just as understandably the “ire” of those committed to the “Classic” theology that until modern times was universally held and even today is the (at least popular) majority report.⁴⁰⁷ They let their contrasting views be known in various publications.⁴⁰⁸ Univocity would put dynamite in the biblically sanctioned (Ex. 3:6) unequivocal Creator-creation distinction. Temporality and mutability would do the same in the biblically attested eternity

elaborated on his reference to “our hearts,” and added that they would fit perfectly in the *regenerate heart* with its double occupancy, which would do away with all “discomforts?” He would have given his Systematic Theology an *evangelistic and healing* touch, if not dimension, vis-à-vis unbelievers, spelling out the necessity of, if not calling for a heart transplant (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:5), and a *sanctifying and healing* dimension vis-à-vis believers, spelling out the need of, if not pleading for a purified heart (Jam. 4:8c). He also would have been able to pinpoint *why* the Sovereignty, Transcendence and Universality that are argued by apostate philosophy only have the “sounds” in common with their theological counterparts. Candidly, to go on record that there is an unbridgeable gap, even in a shared terminology, between apostate falseness and biblical truth (ST, 41-48, 57, 430, 713) is a much-needed commodity that is to be greatly applauded, not in the last place because it is too rare. But to show that an apostate dialectic victimized and forced this philosophy, their authors, and their promoters to do Satan’s bidding to fill these concepts with a content that would have turned the God of Scripture and, with it, Christianity into an impossibility, would have been a crowning achievement. It would make today’s folks think twice before using such philosophy as their handmaiden. At any rate, “that would be the day,” if a Systematic Theology would not just be an island by itself, simply content to secure mental agreement, but rather were encapsulated in Christ’s Triple Marching Order, consciously and intentionally, in evangelistic and sanctifying zeal, along with fervent prayers, to be graced with heart transplants in unbelievers and purification of heart and life in believers. Then the definition of theology as “application,” as coined by Frame, would come truly into its own!

⁴⁰⁶ K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13, 110, 188, 254-255. To be sure, God never ceases “to be essentially eternal.” However, in his “covenantal” relationship to his creation he “takes on temporal properties,” that he apparently would not have had apart from his *ad extra* personal interaction with temporal creature man. This comes down to two modes of being on God’s part. The plot thickens when it is intimated that God took on his new properties once (after?) he had decided on his (new?) role as Creator. It thickens even further, when the Incarnation of the Godman is suggested as the model for the dual mode of existence. The question may well arise whether this identifies the new properties as creaturely properties. This leads to a next question. Do the original and creaturely properties relate to each other in a Nestorian or Eutychian fashion, or should Chalcedon come to the rescue? The misery of the theo-ontological enterprise seems endless. To put an end to such enterprise is precisely what Chalcedon sought and succeeded in doing by its “four negatives” that both simply and profoundly honor the incomprehensible complementarity of truth! Beeke, RST, I, 677-682, weighs in on all this as well.

⁴⁰⁷ I define the proponents of the “classic” doctrine of define simplicity as those who hold to the “absolute” attribute-identity in the eternal Godhead. I recognize that they differentiate from those who *a la* Aquinas argue for a “conceptual/rational distinction” of the Divine attributes with a *fundamentum in re*, that is, for a distinctiveness which “rests upon” God’s essence. But in the light of the terminology of “resting upon” the conclusion may well be justified, if push comes to shove, that they do not deny their identity *in the* essence. Of course, the plot thickens when based upon the three *viae* they also argue of the *eminenter* presence of the attributes in the *ad intra* essence of God. If so, they would form a hybrid (self-contradicting) species of interpreters. In that case, they would alternately have to say, “yes and no,” or “no and yes,” when asked the question whether the attributes are “synonymous” *ad intra*. At any rate, in the present context I target only those who hold to the absolute *ad intra* attribute-identity. I aim to deal with the others (hybrids?) in the last two Sections.

⁴⁰⁸ See for this animus specifically, James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), and, *All that is in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017) as well as Samuel Renihan, ed., *God without Passions: A Reader* (Palmdale, CA: TBAP, 2015) and Ronald S. Baines, et alii, eds., *Confessing the Impassible God* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015). The latter two publications served as a virtual rationale for the ecclesiastical split in the General Assembly of the Association of the Reformed Baptist Churches (ARBCA) that was precipitated by a difference of view of or approach to the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility.

(Ps. 90:1-4; Ps. 102:27) and immutability (Mal. 3:16; Jam. 1:17) of God. Any “addition” to the Biblical edifice regarding God, for whatever reason, even if it is *only* after his *creatio ex nihilo* simply would not “add up.” It would domesticate God (univocity) and transform him in the creature’s image (temporality and mutability). Hence it must be opposed to the hilt and contested at all cost. That this warfare is not exactly helpful to advance the Kingdom is an understatement. Just think of the time and energy that is spent in research, lectures, and publications. At times this is necessary (2 Cor. 10:5; Jude 3). But this makes it no less lamentable.

All in all, thus far we have covered a lot of necessary ground to stake out the arguments against Divine Immutability, whether in whole or in part. It is noteworthy that neither the Classic Immutabilists (in the earlier sections) nor the Total or Partial Mutabilists refer to the mystery of the complementarity of truth that can only come to cognitive, volitional and emotional rest in the regenerate heart. The *existence* of mystery is fully acknowledged by virtually all. But pinpointing the *location* of mystery, apart from Divine Incomprehensibility in general, is a different matter. Further, virtually all authors aver that the proper worship of God is at stake. But none of them inform us what their theology concretely entails in terms of hands-on obedience. We read their erudite and often informative and enlightening expositions. But life appears to go on as usual. Virtually no challenge whatsoever to act out what we have heard and how to do so (Jam. 1:19-25), let alone a potent reminder, if not exhortation to pursue Christ’s all-encompassing Threefold Marching Order (Mt. 28:19-20) as “the only thing needful!” Is it per chance because, in disregard of Deuteronomy 29:29, too much essentially arrogant (?), impermissible, and inadmissible preoccupation with the incomprehensible (and forbidden) “secrets” of God prevents them from paying the proper attention to the revealed and mandate “ethics” of God? This leads us to the next section.

X. An Analytic Comparison

Well, time has come to start finalizing a still somewhat preliminary comparison, analysis, and assessment. Our survey did not cover every possible author. Frankly, the literature volume is daunting and its content displays an epitome of at times convoluted confusion, as it presents itself so much and so frequently as a forest of conflicting views that it is difficult, if not impossible at times to locate the different trees, let alone to determine their shape and relationship to each other.⁴⁰⁹ But all the relevant issues are now in the open. The battle lines are equally in the open. The question now faces all of us how to adjudicate the controversy from a biblical perspective. However, in the present Section I wish to settle two preliminary issues prior to the analytic comparison. Following this I formulate my “take,” in fact, a number of “takes” in this clearly multifaceted and complicated matter in the next Section, my Provisional Conclusion.

My first preliminary observation is that vis-à-vis any, and all apostate non-Christian philosophical input we must be Tertullian in our approach and verdict.⁴¹⁰ His heartfelt aversion to “Athens” is well-known. “Philosophers are the patriarchs of heretics.”⁴¹¹ So, he wishes “for Christians to clear away those noxious vapors exhaled from philosophy which obscure the clear and wholesome atmosphere of truth.”⁴¹² Not so well-known is his concession that the philosophers of his day are not devoid of all truth, such as in their reference to the Logos.⁴¹³ In both he is Pauline to the core. Essentially non-Christian philosophy, he asserts, is “vain deceit” as it reflects the all too human traditions (Col. 2:8). At the same time, he holds that the fragments of the admittedly present truth that he encounters are still on balance suppression of that truth within the larger philosophical framework in which they are presented (Acts 17:28-29). Hence Paul’s call to repentance (Acts 17:30). In both Paul and Tertullian disjunction clearly does (and must) trump coherence and disconnect connectedness. Therefore, opposition does (and must) prevail over acceptance and rejection over embrace. The animus behind their concern and the fervor of their warnings are easily explainable. For them it was a matter of either spiritual and eternal

⁴⁰⁹ See Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God*, who throughout refers to a plethora of authors who contribute to this complicated picture.

⁴¹⁰ In what follows, Wolterstorff’s essay, “*Tertullian’s Enduring Question*,” in, IG, 283-303, was quite helpful. That I did not end up at the same spot and with the same view as he, does not diminish my appreciation for his insightful contribution in laying out the various relevant issues.

⁴¹¹ Quoted in Muller, PRRD, III, 174.

⁴¹² Quoted in IG, 284. A telling parallel is on display in the world of Islam. Al Gazali (1059-1111) was so averse to the adoption of Aristotelian philosophy to produce a scientific foundation for the theology of Islam, which resulted in an Arabic scholasticism that he published his famous volume, *Destructio Philosophorum* (The Destruction of the Philosophers). This was passionately contested and countermanded in the Arab West by Averroes (1126-1198). He embraced Aristotle as his “beloved master” and produced a slew of commentaries on his writings. His consequent Aristotelian rationalizing philosophy became so influential, if not victorious that it threatened basic tenets of Mohammedan orthodoxy, which ended up siding with Al Gazali, condemning Averroes, and burning his books. The latter led to the pithy comment that “this did as little harm as in other similar cases.” See for this, Storig, I, 236-237.

⁴¹³ See for this, Bavinck, RD, II, 323-324.

death as the inevitable legacy of the philosophers or spiritual and eternal life through the person and work of Christ! The stakes were and are high. In fact, they could not be higher!

Candidly, if not regrettably, an alternate approach has by and large won the day in Church history. God sows delectable clusters of truth, to be designated as common graces, throughout created reality. They are also embodied in many (a multitude of?) penetrating, deep, rich, and enriching insights of philosophers (and other types of thinkers), only to be overlooked, ignored, opposed, or rejected at one's detriment. Isn't all truth God's truth? So, and by all means, be not (all too) critical in your looking for them, searching for them, finding them, applauding them, incorporating them, enjoying them, flourishing with them and passing them on! That is all there is to it!

Not so fast, Tertullian would exclaim, undoubtedly with a pulsating shepherd's heart (!), don't you know that it is the human wisdom of invariably and sadly conflicting philosophies that has produced the heterodoxies and heresies of the day, thus threatening the health and mission of the Church, and sealing the fate of millions? Don't you know either that what philosophers are in their persons, their motivations, their commitments, their loves, and their objectives, etc., cannot but mold and infect their thinking? Bound to be un-Godly, if not counter-Godly, as they are? So, how then can Christians with radically different motivations, etc., be their co-thinking bedfellows, as if they have the same agenda and are heading in the same direction? Seeking to be Godly and pro-Godly, as these are? "Where is the likeness between the Christian and the philosopher, between the man who builds up and the man who pulls down, between friends of error and foes of error, between the one who corrupts the truth and the one who restores and teaches the truth, between the truth's thief and the truth's custodian?"⁴¹⁴ Hence, no "brotherly" alliance, whether in whole or in part. "We will be eaten alive!"

It may well be that Tertullian went a mite too far. God has bestowed mankind with a near-infinite number of common graces that cover the waterfront of life, if not the universe. They doubtlessly show up in mankind's thought-life as well. Just think of the ever-accelerating historical progress in every area of life, inclusive of the untold number of gratifying life-improving inventions, such as, the Printing Press that was of immense assistance to advance and solidify the Reformation, and the Internet in modern times that spectacularly speeds up the arrival of new information, to name only two inventions among the millions of whatever sort in the areas of medicine, music, education, construction, transportation, etc., etc.. Of course, these "graces" may be enjoyed and used with thanksgiving. Let us never overlook, ignore, or forget that common graces due to the astounding kindness and goodness of God make the engine of life run smoothly, often remarkably and delightfully so (Ps. 145:9-10; Jonah 4:2; Mt. 5:45; Lk. 6:35). But let is not stop there. Let us never forget either that they also do and are meant to render their ungodly recipients without excuse in the Judgment (Rom. 1:20).

However, what is even more poignant and seems so universally missed or ignored in the treatments, discussions, and debates about common grace that it may look like a "black hole," let us always remember that they constitute as many "kind" summonses to repentance to save from God's present and future wrath (Rom. 2:4). Since the number of common graces is staggering, so are these summonses. The producers of the common graces in the area of apostate philosophical thought, including the icons in Ancient philosophy, such as Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, as well as the similar icons in Modern Philosophy, such as Kant, Hegel

⁴¹⁴ Quoted in IG, 294.

and Heidegger, clearly have ignored, in fact, rejected these summonses out of hand, and even with them in their portfolio have single-mindedly barreled onward to the destruction of themselves as well as their adherents. No wonder, once again, that Paul (1) indicts them as “empty deceivers,” (2) chides them for (arrogantly) “suppressing the God of truth,” inclusive of the very truth lavished upon them by him in the truth of common graces, (3) informs them that in and through these same common graces God insists on their repentance (Acts 17:30), and (4) characterizes them and their followers as “inexcusable children of wrath” (Rom. 1:20c; Eph. 2:3c).

Frankly, I am not aware of any philosophy department, liberal arts institution, or seminary, for that matter, where the need of their so-called “delightful” icons for repentance is soberly, let alone tearfully explained, and bound upon the hearts of students, if only to warn them solemnly not to follow in their essential footsteps, their motivation, their thinking and their objectives, which lead to their eternal doom. Instead of exposing and destroying their speculations and imposing edifices that vie against the knowledge of God, they are often, if not usually quoted as luminaries that can shed light on our forward paths, that is as “handmaidens” to arrive at our “destiny,” similar to the scholastic use of the prevailing philosophies in the Middle Ages. Once again, this is not to deny that they may be recipients of God’s common graces in terms of insights, etc. But it is to plead also in this context to honor the complementarity of truth and not to opt for a one-sided approach. To tilt too much is to capsize. It is necessary to remind ourselves that the recipients of common graces face summonses of repentance in these very graces! It should not come as a surprise that all this is significant in the pursuit of the Divine “ethics,” specifically in its first “evangelism” prong. Common graces constitute an essential element in evangelistic outreach. They are the silent, but eloquent summonses to repentance that the Church may and must “verbalize.” Since they are virtually innumerable, the Church should have a field day to bring them to expression in the context of hands-on programmatic Gospel outreach, which is all too often lacking.

So, what is the bottom line? Make sure to acknowledge the near-ubiquitous presence of common graces, wherever they are found, also in the thinking processes and hands-on products of unbelievers. But first examine them carefully to determine whether they are truly common graces or Satan’s lies dressed up as such (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Then, when found “truthful,” proceed with a “process in antithesis” and conclude with at best a reverse “hostile take-over.” Antithetical hostility in the face of “empty deceivers.” “Take-over process” to retrieve “stolen goods.” All this while inwardly mourning and verbally lamenting the final fate of both the impenitent producers of common graces and of all the possible millions who have been spiritually slaughtered by their “empty deceit.” Frankly, in the vast scholarly literature that dealt with the analysis and assessment of the producers of un-Godly or counter-Godly edifices and their deceived adherents I have rarely, if ever tasted a Pauline and Tertullian burden and anguish for souls. This, for one, simply must change! That it will “sanitize” the analysis and assessment of their products would be only a joyful by-product.

Of course, common graces do not merely summon *unbelievers* to repentance, endlessly so in view of their near-infinite number. They address and summon *believers* just as equally and just as much.⁴¹⁵ Of course, only *special* grace *will* produce it. So, we better incessantly

⁴¹⁵ “Common graces” have been aptly identified as “the chemicals that keep a corpse from stinking.” But there is more, much more to be said. Common graces are undoubtedly gifts of God’s kindness, goodness and benevolence.

call on the Lord for this (Jer. 31:18) and just as incessantly proclaim this avenue as a matter of life and death. Oh, for a grace-produced “burden for souls” in academia that will blossom into the hot pursuit of Christ’s Grand Triple Command to win them and sanctify them as “the only (twofold) thing needed” for their eternity, and therefore mandated by Jesus as such (Mt. 28:19-20)! And corollary this this, oh, for a grace-produced burden for our own holiness without which no one can see God (Hebr. 12:14), as it is identified in the Word (John 8:31-32; 17:17) and stimulated by the millions of the enjoyed “common graces!”

At any rate, a Pauline and Tertullian approach and verdict will doubtlessly be needed to analyze and assess the wide array of views regarding Divine Immutability, not in the last place because a variety of scholars has determined either that it (absolutely?) needs philosophical underpinnings, or simply has turned to philosophical, often very erudite, and intricate considerations, so as to get a 20-20 vision of this Doctrine. Whatever the verdict, it will veto any type of alliance with philosophical thinking content or patterns that is infected with even the least trace of futility and deceit (2 Cor. 6:14-15). Incidentally, the modern scholar Wolterstorff (ironically?) adds to all this that it may not even be honorable, in fact, that it can be called “abusive arrogance”⁴¹⁶ to “scavenge” a philosopher’s works by plucking out fragments for incorporation into one’s own synthesis, while paying not the least attention to the contours of the original author’s motivation, agenda, objectives, etc.

With a number of possible (necessary?) deviations Augustine may well have started to show us the way, “The Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of the philosophers, ought to take away their ‘gold and silver’ from them (Egypt-like; see Ex. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35) and devote (them) to their proper use in preaching the gospel.” With the deviations it could (should?) read, “The Christian, having separated himself by definition from the miserable and self-destructive fellowship of the philosophers, and having recorded the radical antithesis between them and Biblical truth, should feel free to reclaim the fragments of truth which God left them with a view to their repentance, to decontaminate them if, when and where possible and retool them for use in the proclamation of the Gospel.”

Augustine’s heart-throbbing and hence heart-warming reference to the proclamation of the Gospel, which in the present context may come as a surprise to most academicians today, but should be passionately welcomed by all of them, brings me immediately to my second preliminary point. In short order, this point is based upon my conviction that according to Scripture the present world has no independent purpose. The only reason why it still exists is to produce a Church to the glory of God. In short, Christ as the Lion-Lamb is turning this world into a breeding-ground for new Christians (Rev. 5:9). Of course, the Genesis 1 dominion mandate is still in force. The universal Fall is not allowed to derail it. “‘Doomed’ (damned) if we don’t obey it!” No work? No food (2 Thess. 3:10)! But also, “‘doomed’ (damned), if we do!” This world is subjected by God himself to radical and total futility! The

But to the extent that they are the products of man, they are also designated as “earthly, unspiritual, devilish” (Jam. 3:15). From this perspective “common graces” are “beautiful poison” or “poisonous beauty” (Jam. 3:8). As “beautiful gifts” from “Above” (Jam. 3:17) they are spiritually ravishing and enriching, including their crowning piece as summonses to repentance. By all means, do enjoy them, and make steady and proper use of them to the glory of God. As “poison pills” from “below” (Jam. 3:15) they are potentially spiritually ravaging and impoverishing. By all means, sober up, and never idolize them (1 Cor. 7:29-31; 1 John 5:21), equally to the glory of God. Another remarkable instance of the incomprehensible complementarity of truth! A heart’s embrace of both truths simultaneously has an enormous practical pay-off. It will prevent one from being swallowed up alive by the things and riches of this world (Phil. 3:19c; Jam. 4:4) and from being quarantined in an isolated and fruitless ghetto (Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5)!

⁴¹⁶ Wolterstorff, IG, 296.

worldwide flood testifies to that. When Noah exited the Ark, he saw nobody and nothing. The Flood waters produced a total wipe-out of all people together with all their impressive cultural achievements (Gen. 4:20-22). Clearly, without the fear of God and obedience to God (Eccl. 12:13), this world proves to be a dead-end street! So, here comes the Lion-Lamb to justify the continuation of our bankrupt world by procuring a Church through his precious blood and gives the latter a ringing mandate, an all-encompassing marching order! “I as the Lion-Lamb (King-Priest) turned this world into a spawning-ground. Now, you as king-priests (lion-lambs) turn it into your fishing-ground. Make disciples! Evangelize so that the fear of God emerges. Then, baptize them as the indelible imprint of their radically and totally new identity. Finally, teach them to observe whatever I command. Train disciples to obey me! This Grand Triple Command is the only mandate that I enjoin you to pursue. Yes, you must take dominion and multiply. But all of this must serve the hot pursuit of the Grand Command if it is going to amount to anything. ‘Proclaim the Gospel to win souls. Proclaim their new citizenship in Baptism. Proclaim the Word to effect holiness.’ In that order!”

In a word, World History, orchestrated by the Cultural Mandate, does and will go on without change after the temporary interruption of a depopulated world and its totally wiped-out culture.⁴¹⁷ Noah and his family simply did, in fact, had to pick up where they had

⁴¹⁷ So emphatically and quite correctly, Frame, ST, 68. See for this also, John Frame, *The Escondido Theology* (Lakeland FL: Whitfield Media Productions, 2011), 136-137. See further, Willem J. Ouweneel, *The World is Christ's* (Grimsby, ON: Ezra Press, 2017), 191-199, for the purpose of the Noachic Covenant. Frankly, the Noachic Covenant is frequently treated like an “orphan,” if not like a “sore thumb.” Supposedly made with creation, it allegedly does not fit in with the other covenants that focus on redemption and is the start of a “brand-new ‘kingdom.’” This is fueled by “common grace,” governed by “natural law” to effect “civil righteousness,” and so meant to serve mankind in general as it operates and functions in its “this-worldly” (“public-square”) existence. As such it runs parallel to, if not independently from the kingdom of redemption, which is fueled by “grace,” governed by “Biblical Law” to effect “divine righteousness,” designed to serve the Church, as it is on its way to the “here-after” of eternal life. This interpretation of the Noachic covenant is a fundamental, if not gross error. The Noachic covenant constitutes one perfectly fitting “story” in the covenantal edifice which I prefer to designate as “the covenant of life” that can best be interpreted as a “bond-relationship.” The first “story” is the “Paradisial” covenant with a focus upon law, the law concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:16-17). The second one is the “post-fall” covenant with a focus upon promise, the promise of a Victorious Messiah (Gen. 3:15). The third one is the “Noachic” covenant with a focus upon promise, the promise of the continuation of history (Gen. 6:18; 8:21-22; 9:11, 16-17). The fourth one is an “Abrahamic” covenant and specifies a further promise, the promise of an innumerable offspring (Gen. 15:18). The fifth one is a further “Abrahamic” covenant that focuses upon law (Gen. 17:1-14). The sixth one is the “Mosaic” Covenant that further details law (Deut. 5:1-21; 31:16-17). The seventh one is the “Davidic” covenant, which promises the Davidic Messiah-King (Ps. 89:34-3). In the covenantal stories thus far, the law and the promise appear to “leapfrog” over each other which reflect an extremely transparent rationale. Whenever the law was violated, the promise had to come to the rescue as an expression of the love, grace, and mercy of God. When it did, the law immediately entered the picture again as required by the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God. In the eighth and final one, the “New Covenant,” promise and law merged (Jer. 3:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-26), (to be) personified in the Messiah (Is. 42:6; 49:8) and personalized by the Holy Spirit (Is. 59:21). As such it is the Penthouse of the Covenantal Edifice as a Bond-relationship of Life. All this goes to say that none of these “stories” stick out as a “sore thumb.” They *all* serve the grand and fully integrated purpose of God to end up with an “innumerable multitude” (Rev. 7:9) to enjoy, serve, and worship him forever in a life of utter holiness (Rev. 21:2). For a critique of the so-called “two-kingdom” theory, which is a historical novelty, all protestations to the contrary, see the persuasive volumes of Frame and Ouweneel, mentioned above. But what “nails” this “theory” once and for all is the Church’s mandate to “verbalize” the innumerable summonses embodied in the innumerable common graces in the context of “making disciples of *all* ‘this-worldly’ nations.” “Such ‘verbalization’ occurs, by definition, in the heartland of the “‘common graced, public square.’” The notion that this “square” has a separate, if not independent existence is more than just a “pipedream.” In its essence it overlooks, if not ignores the fact that “the bankrupt public square” only exists as the

left off. Even if they had to start from scratch again, they had *no other option* in a world in which God did not, does not, and will not change his *modus operandi*, although ever since the Fall it resembled a trying treadmill of sorts on account of its inherent futility (Eccl. 1:2; 12:8; Rom. 8:20) with its “march of the living dead.” However, they *could* “pick up” again. After all, “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday” were on the horizon. These would arrive as planned before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19-20) and foretold upon mankind’s Fall into sin (Gen. 3:15). It was this twofold Towering Salvation Event that spawned the Grand Triple Command in its wake (Lk. 24:46-48)! It would trump the intrinsic futility of both the clearly uninterrupted and just as clearly (!) unintermittible Cultural Mandate as God’s provision to make all of history meaningful again, whether societal or individual, corporate, or personal. In fact, it is the only way! The Evangelism Mandate aims to produce the fear of God through the Gospel, thus reconnecting the nations with the Source of all meaning. The Baptism Mandate forges an identifiable Army, thus reconnecting it with the Administrator of all meaning. The Teaching Mandate aims to effect obedience to God through the Word, thus reconnecting them with the Grid of all meaning. The innumerable common graces with which “the historical march of the living dead” is literally awash due to the kindness and goodness of God are designed to assist the Church to put the rocket of the Grand Command in orbit. They are the innumerable summonses to repentance unto life (Rom. 2:4; Acts 11:18). They silently urge folks everywhere to take a bath in the blood of Christ and so to be refreshed (Acts 3:19). Once again, it is the Church’s privilege to verbalize these innumerable summonses innumerable times in innumerable conditions, innumerable situations, and innumerable settings. In fact, it is its mandate! To be “lukewarm” is to turn into spit, and we are told where that ends up (Rev. 3:16).⁴¹⁸

This must have captured the attention and imagination of Augustine. All his fire power, inclusive of what he finds, reclaims, sanitizes, and utilizes from apostate philosophers, serves the presentation and proclamation of the Gospel. Frankly, he seems to have very few followers in academia who explicitly present this as their great and magnificent obsession. “Whatever does not serve the Gospel in whatever I read in the products or practice of unbelievers, is a virus, a deadly virus. So, out it goes!” It is a well-documented fact that every ecclesiastical downgrade is precipitated by compromising and infested Institutions of Higher Learning that ignore the Towering Mandate of Christ’s Triple Command “as the only thing

Christ’s “spawning ground” to produce the Church, and the Church’s “fishing ground” and therefore “target” of its Ambassadorial Ministry. To miss this is Christ- as well as self-defeating. To produce a theory that “justifies” the regrettably all too often, if not near-ingrained “practice” of evangelistic silence on the part of the Church may well be “unconscionable!”

⁴¹⁸ This was the challenge that was hurled at me by a brave preacher. Frankly, it “nailed” me as it opened my eyes to the displeasure of my Lord with a Church that refuses to recognize that evangelism is part of its sanctification, and that delinquency comes with a terrible cost. The rest is history, a personally improved and ever-improvable history. Not so incidentally in this significant context, an unacceptable, in fact, unconscionably warped view of the Noahic Covenant, as if God introduced a change of pace in and purpose of history, terminating the Cultural Mandate as undoable by fallen mankind, has led some folks to conclude that in the various contexts of “commonness” with unbelievers the Church should cooperate with them to produce meaning of whatever sort *apart* from the Gospel and *without* the expressed Law of God. This does not only put a theoretical foundation under the Church’s already prevailing practice of deafening evangelistic silence. It also prevents (forbids?) it from referring to God’s Law in the Public Square. In the process undefined and undefinable *natural law* is called upon to spruce up “the march of the living dead.” Candidly, No Gospel? No Life! Also, No Law? No Holiness? Well, No Life and No Holiness? Fill in the blank!

needful” since it is “the only thing” that can have an individual and corporate “sanitizing” effect, which includes all common grace productivity.⁴¹⁹

Since this Grand Command covers the waterfront of life, it also does and must include the theological enterprise. Theology has been defined as “application.” While I am in full agreement with what the originator drives at with this definition,⁴²⁰ it still seems a rather obscure terminology to me and open for misunderstanding. So, I prefer to define theology as “the study that aims at the presentation and proclamation of “Scriptural Truth-for-Life,” “Scriptural-Learning-for-Living,” “Scriptural-Walk-in-the-Word,” or similar well-known or current graphic and pointed mantras. In other words, it sets forth the wholesome truth of Scripture together with its necessary, inevitable, and authoritative implication for and application to all of life.

All this said, the focus upon and study of Divine Immutability as well must ensure three things. (1) The presentation and proclamation of its truth may not be contaminated or compromised by “empty and deceitful” considerations of the apostate philosophical sort. Scripture must be honored as the sole *principium cognoscendi*. The notion that this Doctrine *cannot* (italics, mine) be fully understood and accepted without philosophical considerations must raise more than eyebrows. In fact, it must be promptly dismissed as unacceptable. The sufficiency of Scripture is at stake. (2) Its presentation and proclamation must spell out clearly and boldly the obligatory and indispensable implications for the total waterfront of the Christian life. (3) Its presentation and proclamation must both serve and be part of the hot pursuit of Christ’s Grand Command of making disciples by means of the Full New Covenant Gospel, baptizing them in the Name of the Triune God, and training them in holiness by means of the Full Word of God from Genesis to Revelation.

If the latter two points are not observed and all that is envisioned is to arrive at and end up with a bare, “naked” technical or a so-called objective definition of a specific doctrine, one’s wading in the Immutability-Mutability controversy, as stated in the beginning of this volume, will produce no more than “a (verbal) tempest in a (mental) teapot.” Everyone goes home, whether in a joint formality or in open separation. But it remains business as usual. No appreciable transformation of life and no greater hunger to obey Christ’s Grand Triple Command. It would be height of irony if the “usual business” of the various “warring parties” would be the same before and after. Candidly, I would not be surprised if this is the predominant outcome of most controversies that Church History has experienced. The “teapot” all too often has the final ironic word! The bottom line? Divine Immutability, as well as Divine Simplicity, must mean something, in fact, must mean something big! It must be truth for an abundant life and for a spontaneous explosion of the Church. Otherwise it means nothing!

Now on to the analytic comparison. This comes in three parts.

⁴¹⁹ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), esp. 819-851, has been an eye-opener for me and many others. He demonstrates that historically all Institutions of Higher Learning, birthed by Churches, eventually distanced themselves from their godly “Mother,” first in spirit, then organizationally, and finally, in fact. It is hardly surprising that they invariably ended up killing her by means of their graduates. All this prompted the staggering statement by D.G. Hart, printed on the back cover, “Burtchaell’s bold and bracing book should be read by all Christians, whether in the academy or not, tempted to think that higher education will increase the influence of the Gospel.” May his incisive clarion call be heard, appreciated, *and receive the appropriate action*.

⁴²⁰ Frame, DKG, 81-85. For a lengthy in-depth discussion in Orthodox Reformed scholasticism about theology as theoretical, practical or both, see Muller, PRRD, I, 208-220, 340-354.

First, let us look at “the lay of the land.” There is general agreement that Scripture teaches both God’s transcendence and God’s immanence. It also teaches that they function simultaneously. It may well be that Bavinck with his worshipful exclamation, with which he starts his treatment of the doctrine of God, namely, that “mystery is the hallmark of systematic theology”⁴²¹ had the relationship of these two realities in mind. Both the Classic Immutabilists and (most of) the more recent Mutabilists royally emphasize the presence of Divine mystery. But in their theologizing a possibly alarming feature appears to creep in repeatedly. “Something” *must* be asserted and maintained relating to Divine Immutability. Otherwise “something else” goes *necessarily* by the board. Or if “something” is asserted and prevails “something else” *cannot* be maintained. All by good and necessary consequence! Here are some samples.

“Divine Simplicity,” in which the (ontological) eternal essence God is identical to his perfections and all his perfections are synonymous even if they are on refracted display in time, is a *must*. Otherwise, the “absoluteness” of God is compromised and *cannot* be maintained.⁴²²

“Divine Immutability,” in which God is not subject to change, whether ontologically or in any other way, shape or form, *must* remain in place. Otherwise, God is made to reflect man and the ontological Creator-creature distinction goes by the board and *cannot* be held firm.⁴²³

“Divine Temporality,” in which God is a participant in human affairs, *must* be confirmed as a necessity. Otherwise, God *cannot* possibly relate with temporal man and temporal creation.⁴²⁴

“Divine Mutability,” in which God changes his thinking, will, emotions, and actions in his relationship to humans, *must* be endorsed as a certainty. Otherwise God *cannot* interact with man.⁴²⁵

What bothers me is the repeated “*must* or otherwise,” and “*cannot* or otherwise,” by good and necessary consequence.⁴²⁶ It betrays a failure to rest mentally, volitionally, and

⁴²¹ Bavinck, RD, II, 29.

⁴²² Dolezal, AG, 78. See for this also, Long, PSTG, 23.

⁴²³ Rennie, in Baines, CIG, 287, 302-303.

⁴²⁴ Wolterstorff, IG, 152, “So in conclusion, if God were eternal, God could not be aware, concerning any temporal event, that it is occurring nor aware that it was occurring, nor aware that will be occurring, nor could God remember that has occurred; nor could God plan to bring it about and do so. But all of such actions are presupposed by, and essential to the biblical presentation of God as a redeeming God. Hence God as presented by the biblical writers is fundamentally non-eternal. God is fundamentally in time.” Here the complementarity of truth is simply “wiped out.” Although this may not be immediately relevant, Wolterstorff is clearly “keen” to safeguard a “redeeming God.” But what it means for God “to redeem” is not spelled out. While it is admittedly his authorial privilege to do so or not, the question is relevant what he would say, if he were to do so. After all, no one should be content with “mere theologizing,” without presenting, if not insisting on the action required by it!

⁴²⁵ This “must” on the part of Mutabilists is perceptively picked up by Taneli Kukkonen, “Eternity,” in OHMP, 529. He refers to William Lane Craig who is in favor of a “tensed” view of eternity (The so-called A-Theory, versus the more orthodox B-Theory which holds to a “tenseless” one, arguably characterized by a “permanent now” (*nunc permanens*). He avers in an all too human way that “only a God who enters time can interact with creation in meaningful ways.” Of course, who can or will tell God what he can or cannot do, that is, apart from indisputable indicators on Scripture (Jam. 1:13)? To put it quite mildly, it seems rather preposterous to do so (Rom. 11:33-34).

⁴²⁶ I add here with great trepidation that it also bothers me when the Medieval as well as Post-Reformation scholastics tell us that for God to be “Absolute Being” or “First Being” he *must* be non-composite. This is “Greek” reasoning with a vengeance. (This is also (regrettably) in evidence as “a little spot” in the otherwise more than excellent and

emotionally in the complementarity of truth. It essentially forces the one “side” into the mold of the other “side.” The “side” that is victimized must experience this as an act of “mental terror.” Thankfully, this kind of terrorizing reasoning is totally absent in “Chalcedon.” It is not just a “breath” of fresh air. It is a veritable “ground swell,” an “outpouring” of truth that has oxygenated the lifeblood of the Church for Centuries, even if not in every part of its existing doctrinal bone-structure.

Of course, this is not to take anything away from the animus behind it all. Immutabilists infer: You don’t want to lose God’s Transcendence, do you? Similarly, Mutabilists tell us: You don’t want to get rid of God’s immanence, do you?

Still, the question may well (should?) arise whether the reasoning behind it goes “a bridge too far” from the perspective of Scripture, which is the sole *principium cognoscendi*. That is, trying (like blind men?) to grope at or at least around the mystery to determine its contours and to make it at least somewhat intelligible!

In this, the *second* part, let us begin with a look at the Mutabilists. There are clearly two doctrinal strands in Scripture. One strand emphasizes 100% Divine transcendence and the other 100% Divine immanence. But to ascribe “essential” or “additional” temporality and mutability to God, is, or at least appears to tilt toward Divine immanence at the expense of Divine transcendence, and to “treat God” as “a being among beings.”⁴²⁷ In fact, to do so in whole (total mutability) or in part (partial mutability) is or at least appears to dispense with transcendence altogether, to limit it severely, or to pay lip-service only. The victimizing “terrorism” can hardly be missed. Apart from the fact that every tilt is liable to capsize, this is or at least should be unacceptable *per se*. How does Scripture solve, or at least appears to solve this conundrum? Well, one thing is and should be incontestable. The only way to honor the mystery of the simultaneity of both poles is to embrace them jointly in a child-like fashion (Ps. 131:2; Lk. 18:7). If this were done, it would translate into a heartfelt embrace of what possibly could be described as a “relational immutability” (Ware), a “historical immutability” (Frame), or a “covenantal immutability” (Oliphint), similar to calling light a “wavicle.”⁴²⁸

highly recommended volume of Matthew Barrett, *None Greater* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 78.) Of course, I wholeheartedly embrace the non-composite *simplicitas Dei*. But it is one thing to confess that God is non-composite on the basis of God’s Inerrant Word as the *sole principium cognoscendi*, and quite another to pontificate (?) in the footsteps of apostate philosophy which insists that God *must* be non-composite to serve as its Absolute or First Being, especially since the simplicity it advocates is not even in the same ballpark as the Biblical Simplicity of the Triune God. In fact, the philosophical “simplicity” that does not allow for any intrinsic particularity laughs Biblical Trinitarian Simplicity out of the ballpark! In the process it removes the Trinitarian Creator-God from its own universe. Tertullian must have more than just sensed this, when he unloaded the vials of his “wrath” upon the Biblical-doctrine and the human-soul destroying philosophies of his day!

⁴²⁷ So, Long, PSTG, 367.

⁴²⁸ I hope that Oliphint would be open to this. But to get to this point, K. Scott Oliphint, *The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016) may have to be re-written. In it he holds that the “Infinite God” does (only can?) relate to “finite creatures” by adding “newly acquired and expressed attributes and characteristics of the economic Trinity” for which the ontological Trinity prior to creation “had no need or occasion.” Apparently without “ontological” additions God would be at an impasse to relate to his creation. Mysterious *revelatory* accommodating condescension of the Infinite and Transcendent God to finite humans so that they can understand him is no longer acceptable. Neither are *temporal* effects as the mysterious result of the will of the *eternal* God according to his immutable plan. When Oliphint adds that all this explains the univocal *reality* of God’s anger, grief, etc., it appears that God, while retaining his original “ontology,” is simultaneously “a being among beings.” In this theo-ontology “mystery” is increasingly unraveling, if not evaporating. His earlier mentioned

In fact, these authors would insist on these formulations in humble submission to the incomprehensible complementarity of truth in this regard as it is presented in Scripture. They would refrain from spending endless hours and energy to penetrate the impenetrable. The last thing they would wish to do is to tell God that he cannot do what he clearly did and does. He is the eternal and immutable God who inter-speaks inter-acts with his temporal and changeable people as he says he does in Scripture.⁴²⁹ So, *we leave it at that* and seek to live up to that. It is arrogance to move beyond this or even try to explain it. Come to think about it, it would certainly open and free lots of time and energy to pursue Christ's Grand Command. No loss and great gain!

At any rate, since Scripture indicates that all of mankind sustains a covenant relationship with God, the "covenantal immutability" combination, which would encompass the "relational" and the "historical" aspects is the most preferable one. "Immutability" is the noun and must carry the primacy as unmistakably taught in Scripture. But "covenantal," although an adjective, must also be honored as equally Scriptural.⁴³⁰ God put us in this world and gave his Word as a guide and a guard. Therefore, we better take both aspects at face

"Statement of Creedal Orthodoxy" is encouraging. But it does not contain a "specification of errors." Hence this Footnote is justifiable, if not justified. For all this, also see Cameron G. Porter, "The Majesty of Mystery: Celebrating the Glory of an Incomprehensible God, A Review Article," in *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* (1917), 83-99, esp. 84-85, 91-93, 98-99. Frankly, at the bottom of Oliphint's "outpourings" is a "contrastive" view of the Creator-creature distinction. This always calls for theo-ontological steps to overcome a perceived gap. It appears that *even God* must bridge it! Furthermore, it can never come to grips with and can never be at peace with complementary truths that have a harmonious resting place in the regenerate heart. The rebellious mind of an *unbeliever* will mockingly dismiss this out of hand. [Martin Heidegger called Christianity a square peg in a round hole, an inescapable contrast in bizarre motion.] The stubborn mind of a *believer* will simply overlook, or dismissively ignore it. It fails, if not refuses to point out that only a child-like regenerate heart can come to grips with God's complementary truths. The Chaos scientist who is content to live with the incomprehensible reality of light as simultaneously a "wave" and a "particle" and goes to work with this reality as his embraced starting point appears to be wiser than the believing theologian who (feverishly?) seeks to solve the unsolvable or at least seeks to make sense of the non-intelligible, while neglecting God's "ethics" or putting it on the backburner.

⁴²⁹ The evidence in Scripture regarding the precise relationship eternity sustains to time is understandably scant. No human can explain it, whether "inspired" or not. It is one of the "secrets" of God. But, if God's *Creatio Ex Nihilo* predicates that his creating activity pertains to both time and space, God was at that occurrence undeniably "eternal," that is, "a-temporal." Hence it cannot be a good and necessary consequence that he is essentially "temporal" after all. While Scripture shows that God acts in time, but never predicates his "temporality," it is not a good and necessary consequence either that he assumed temporality and leads a double existence or has two modes of existence. Since we come here face to face with God's undisclosed "secrets," these two so-called consequences, however logical they may seem, are not permissible and therefore not admissible either! For the argument that "the world was not created *in* time but *with* time," see Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), Book XI, Chapter 6, as well as more recently, Bavinck, RD, II, 162. For the intricacies related to the concept of eternity, especially to Boethius' definition of eternity as "the unending and perfect possession all at once of interminable life" (*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*), see Taneli Kukkonen, "Eternity," in OHMP, 525-543. This definition proves to be obscure, partly because of its brevity. So is the mysterious notion of eternity "as an atemporal entity" and of a phenomenon, such as, "an atemporal mode of knowing." This in contrast to "an interpretation of eternity that is modeled on everlastingness, the ordinary passage of time and the notion of temporally keyed facts (including the knowing process)." Kukkonen goes on record that ever since Boethius, who was the watershed or transitory figure between ancient and medieval philosophy, contradictory interpretations of his "eternity" did the rounds, either ascribing it as a "tensed" (A-Theory) or a "tenseless" (B-Theory) concept. For Boethius' ambiguous definition prowess, see also Ury, TP, 187, 202-212.

⁴³⁰ With his constant reference to the *covenantal* relationship that our a-temporal God sustains to his temporal people, there may be some reason to believe that Frame could go along with this universion of "covenantal-immutability," which honors "mystery" and does not pry into God's "secrets." See for this, Frame, ST, 376-377. He tells us that "as an agent in history, God changes." All he needs is a "simple" change in words, "(even) as an agent in history, God (himself) does not change." *With a clarifying reference to the complementarity of truth!*

value “as a weaned children” and refuse to speculate about “the secret things” of God that are “too wonderful” for us, and in case of need “repent in dust and ashes,” in order, “finally,” to distance ourselves from any and all “wood, straw and stubble,” and be in hot and tireless pursuit of souls and holiness.

At any rate, anything that falls short of this kind of combination or moves beyond it, may well call for “censure” of whatever sort. If censure is resisted with the argument, if not protest, that these combinations, such as “covenantal immutability” are innerly contradictory, we have (finally) arrived at the core of the malady. It augments a *theo-ontological faux pas* that ventures into the incomprehensible or forbidden secrets of God to plumb their *essence*, with a *theo-ontological* one that wishes to have the final *logical* say about their viability. Complementary truth of whatever kind always has two poles that are irreconcilable to the human mind. Is light a wave or a particle? In other words, does it reflect universality of particularity? It is and does both, and, divine irony of divine irony, does so simultaneously. According to the Chaos scientist, it is a “wavicle” (similar to covenantal immutability), whatever a “wavicle” is supposed to mean. At the least, this univibration (verbal combination) displays the humility of the “combiner” in the face of inescapable incomprehensibility.⁴³¹ In short, to hammer away in protest at seeming self-contradiction at any time when faced with the complementarity of truth pulls the cover away from the pretended ultimacy or primacy of the human mind. “What my mind can’t catch, can’t possibly be fish.” Whenever the mind openly insists on ultimacy and is operational in a rebellious capacity (in unbelievers) or when it unwittingly claims primacy and is functioning in an arrogant aptitude (in believers), it creates havoc in a variety of ways. Complementarity is scuttled, the worship of the Triune God recedes, and the focus upon ethics goes by the board.

Of course, the transcendental condition of all knowledge acquisition and all conduct determination is never the functioning of the human mind in the first place. It is the foundational involvement of the human heart as the life-mission control center that is operational in all undertakings with a view to all outcomes. In other words, it is due to their unregenerate heart that unbelievers in their determined rebellion “create” the havoc, first in its internal functions of mind, will and emotions, and then in all of life. It is despite their regenerate heart when believers in their hopefully unwitting arrogance follow suit. Unbelievers are in desperate need of a heart transplant in regeneration (John 3:5) that shows up in repentance, if they ever wish to succeed in stemming, undoing, and reversing the havoc. Believers are in the similar need of a heart purification (Jam. 4:8b) through repentance if they wish to see “sanity” replace “foolishness.” Once the new heart is in place (in unbelievers) or purified (in believers) and recognized as the all-encompassing life-mission control center the stage is fully set to lay out the welcome mat, if not the red carpet, to provide a permanent lodging place, in fact, unimpeded residence for all complementary truth. All thoughts of irreconcilability of its two poles will vanish as snow before the sun, in actual fact, face to face

⁴³¹ This humility was absent in Einstein when, at first, he rejected the brute particularity of quantum physics in the micro-cosm, as this was put on the map of theoretical physics by Heisenberg, in the light of the ordered universality of the equally established general theory of relativity in the macro-cosm. He declared them irreconcilable and by debunking quantum physics he committed what he later confessed to be the greatest error of his iconic career. This humility was absent in Stephen Hawking as well when he throughout his life sought to reconcile both realities of theoretical physics in a Grand Theory of Everything, which, by definition, lies outside of both the jurisdiction of creature man and the operating range of its finite mind. Hence his failure to arrive at such “Theory.” For anyone interested in the intricate details of all this, see Krabbendam, SR, 124-139.

with “The Son.” After all, he is both the donor (1 Pet. 1:2) and the purifier (Hebr. 12:2) of the heart, which in believers is really *his* heart.⁴³² The inevitable outcome is and will be the *shalom* of cognitive, volitional and emotional rest, harmony and peace. This, in turn, cannot but result in the jubilant worship of God who made the humanly impossible divinely possible and real. And this, finally, cannot but evidence itself in the endless pursuit of holiness of heart, mind, will, emotions and life. When folks genuinely jubilate about the mystery of “wavicles” in the framework of theoretical physics and of “covenantal immutability” in a theology of heartfelt faith as (only two) immanent and veritable showcases of the awesomeness of the Transcendent God of Scripture, they have “in principle” arrived on the present earth, where God wants them to be in the first place, even if its “perfect practice” is reserved for the new earth. However, it is and should be crystal clear that to the extent that this God-jubilant about the humanly incomprehensible is in place, the pursuit of holiness will emerge as well. It will convey that there is every reason to pursue perfection while still residing on this earth (Mt. 5:48).

In the light of all this who could possibly protest any “censure” that aims to produce this “havoc-less” effect? If there is any lingering question about this, “Job” provides the cure. Despite the presence of his incontestable and awesome fear of God (Job 1:8; 2:3), God severely “censured” him nevertheless for succumbing to a principal arrogance and therefore unacceptable theo-ontology. This censure led to repentance (Job 42:6), worship (Job 42:1, 5) and holiness (Job 42:8b). Only after that he was fully restored and more (Job 42:12-13; compare Mt. 6:33)!

It is and should be crystal clear as well that failure to censure shows a lack of ecclesiastical love. Biblical love is unconditional, all right. But it is also anti-conditional and reconditioning with a view ultimately to arrive at a mint condition. So, it cannot and will not put up with havoc-producing arrogance, first for the ultimate sake of God’s glory, then out of great concern for God’s Church, and last but not least in compassionate apprehension for God’s wayward children. If the Church has no inkling of the proper diagnosis of the always destructive, and potentially deadly theo-*ontological* or equally dangerous theo-*ontological* virus, no censure can be in the offing and the “havoc” will continue, if not increase. If it is cognitive of the diagnosis, but refuses to proceed with censure, it is adding insult to injury, insult to the God of Job as the God of all, and injury to the havoc-ridden and havoc-producing guilty.

Now on to the Immutabilists. While Mutabilists mainly refer to Scripture and not to philosophical considerations for their stance, other than analytic ones, all too often Immutabilists are more heavily dependent upon philosophical input. Here are several samples. It is admitted that (Classic) Divine Simplicity is not explicitly taught in Scripture. That is, not in so many words, even if there are passages that (more than) hint toward it. But it is such a fundamental concept that so much determines the nature of (at least some, if not many of) the other Divine perfections that philosophy is called upon to add weight to the doctrine, if not to come to its rescue.

⁴³² In Biblical (New Covenant) salvation, resulting from union with Christ, Jesus’ heart is implanted in regeneration by the Holy Spirit and evidenced in repentance and faith, Jesus’ righteousness is credited through repentant faith and sealed by the Holy Spirit, and Jesus’ holiness is implemented in sanctification. It is nothing short of astounding that just as Christ’s righteousness can be imputed and his holiness imparted to many millions, in fact, an innumerable multitude, so his heart can be multiplied in the same number. One (!) Donor, dispensing multitudes of hearts, of righteousnesses, and holinesses! Astounding, indeed! Worthy of astounding worship and praise (Rev. 5:11-12).

It has been perceptively argued that at least for a millennium there existed a gigantic all-encompassing and all-controlling ontological edifice that had captivated the heart, mind and vision of thinking mankind, inclusive of Medieval scholasticism, which was assembled under the influence of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. This said, there is no doubt that the detailed definition of terms such as simplicity, advanced by Aquinas and embraced by Classic Reformation theology, often depends too heavily upon the Ancient Philosophical contribution to this edifice in terms of the undivided One or Absolute (Plato), Pure Form or Abstract Universal (Aristotle) or One or Supreme (Plotinus). This concept is the upper story of a bifurcated reality (Plato), the pinnacle of the scale of being (Aristotle) or the transcendental Source of everything (Plotinus), also designated as “godhead.” Since this “godhead” cannot be contaminated with particularity either by “becoming” or by taking on “parts,” it is and must be eternal and immutable. From there it was a small step to arrive at a type of simplicity that does not allow for any disjunctions, such as essence and existence, act and potency, substance, and accidents, etc., etc., that are viewed as “contrastive” or treated as such. Plotinus’s radicalization of Aristotle with his “godhead” as “the unconditioned condition of everything other than itself” tops it all.⁴³³

It is even possible to give it a further spin with Aquinas! That is, to conclude, if not to insist that God’s rainbow of diverse attributes, of which Ancient philosophy had not even a hunch, unacquainted with Scripture as it was, is simply a temporal refraction of the “eternal light,” in which all these attributes were really identical and synonymous! After all, to deny this would turn God into a composite, and that, of course, is an “unforgivable.” One thing is sure. Without Ancient philosophy looming large behind Aquinas, especially Aristotle as his celebrated (*the*) philosopher, and inclusive of Plotinus as his radicalizer, he would have been hard put to come up with this conclusion just from the biblical data. I am afraid that without all this, neither would we! What other conclusion is possible when we are routinely (?) told that without philosophical input and philosophical considerations, we would not be able to understand or accept this doctrine? This concession does and should speak volumes! It implies that a Greek onto-theology that blossomed into a Medieval (Thomist) theo-ontology paved the way for the Classic Reformation embrace of the type of Divine Simplicity that insists on the total identity and synonymy of all God’s perfections in God’s eternal essence. They may seem fractured *sub specie creationis*, but not so *sub specie aeternitatis*. By good and necessary consequence!⁴³⁴

⁴³³ Gordon H. Clark, as quoted in Douma, *The Presbyterian Philosopher*, 17, astutely described the school of Plotinus as “the flower and culmination of all Greek Philosophy.” There is no doubt that he sought to “plug holes” that Plato and Aristotle left unattended, in fact, were unable to fill. This could not be done without a good measure of brilliance. That he did not and could not succeed either is another matter.

⁴³⁴ It is extremely interesting to note that according to Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, I, 1, 206-207, Plato’s “Forms or *Ideals* (Universals) are comprised in the Principle of Being, in the One, or at least that they owe their existence to the One ... (this is) the Supremely Real, the Perfect Exemplary Cause, the Absolute.” From this top-down perspective “the problem of its internal unity or multiplicity does not so obviously arise.” But “once Ideas of man and other particular objects of our experience are explicitly admitted, the Ideal World threatens to become a Many, a reduplication of this world.” This prompts the question, “what is the relation of the Ideas to one another, and what is their relation to particular things? Is there any real unity at all?” The first question appears to remain unanswered. The second question does get an answer. The Particulars either enjoy “participation” (*methexis*) in the Universal or are an “imitation” (*mimesis*) of the Universal. This twofold answer did not get much traction. Neither concept compellingly bridges the inevitable gap, the *choresis*, between universality and particularity. So apparently also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 6. Aquinas wrestles with the same questions. What is the relationship of the Divine perfections in the

So, at this juncture, arriving at the *third* part, we are facing several sets of pivotal questions.

The first set is inspired by Paul, Tertullian, and Augustine. First, did the theologians who did or do reason in virtual lockstep with Aristotle/Plotinus, recognize with Paul that the common grace insight(s) that they reclaimed were a suppression of the truth in the original framework to start with, which would require repentance? I frankly doubt this. Second, did they understand with Paul and Tertullian that the original philosophical edifice from which they reclaimed (major) parts was an embodiment of “empty deceit,” ultimately aiming at the dethronement of the God of Scripture in arrogant rebellion? I doubt this as well. Third, did they sanitize with Tertullian and Augustine, what they reclaimed before putting it in their theological system? I also doubt this. Fourth, did they conclude with Augustine that they would only incorporate any content in their systematic theology, whether reclaimed from unbelievers or derived from Scripture, what would promote the hands-on advance of the Gospel and concrete growth in Biblical holiness both in transparent reflection and hot pursuit of Christ’s Grand Triple Command? To doubt this may be an understatement.

The second set is based upon a survey of the relevant Biblical data.

First, is there a cogent and unmistakable biblical base for the denial of timeless Divine eternity? The multiple references to God creating the heavens and the earth, starting with Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning ...,” hardly make sense apart from the creation of *both* space *and* time. Combine this with passages, such as, Job 10:4-5; 36:26; Ps. 90:2, 4; John 8:58; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Petr. 3:8, and there is every reason to conclude with Augustine that God created the universe not *in* time but *with* time. Further, Scripture does indeed portray God as an uninterrupted and unintermittible, that is, immanent Actor and Speaker *in* time. But the repeated emphasis upon his towering transcendence (such as, 1 Ki. 8:27; Is. 6:1; 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24) certainly does not confine him to time so as purposely to exclude his a-temporality.⁴³⁵ They rather open a magnificent, soaring, transcendent vista upon the all-creating and all-governing God. No wonder that there is no Biblical indication whatsoever to confine God to time.⁴³⁶ There is every reason to believe that Peter’s statement that time is not “experienced” by God as it is by humans points to his supra-temporality, not just as an “eternal static” now, but rather as an “all-transcending super-abundant cornucopia of glory.”⁴³⁷ Finally, Divine Immutability does and should exclude Divine temporality by definition!⁴³⁸ This “automatically” leads to the next point.

one Divine essence? And what is the relationship of the one undivided essence of God with the multiple complex “other things?” He argues that the perfections are synonymous, and that “other things” are not an integral part of the essence of God but are still an “enhancement.” Frankly, the parallels are striking. But neither the Platonic “participation” or “imitation” theory, nor the Thomist “enhancement” one is very persuasive. Neither should they be. After all, if they could have made it compelling, there would not have been much room, if any, for the Biblical Creation account.

⁴³⁵ See for this also James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1969), 75. Frame, ST, 363, endorses this as well. For a fine discussion of the various issues involved, consult Matthew Barrett, *None Greater* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 139-160.

⁴³⁶ Quite the contrary. Jesus declaration, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am*” (John 8:58), has the transcendence of time stamped upon it.

⁴³⁷ For a fine survey of all that is involved here, see also, Beeke, RST, I, 673-684.

⁴³⁸ Both Wolterstorff, IG, 177, 180, and Paul Helm, *The Eternal God*, 20, are in full agreement that “change in God is what is really the issue.” No change? “Non-Succession-Timeless Eternity!” Change? At best, “Succession-Temporal Everlastingness!”

Second, is there a biblical base for the denial of Divine Immutability? No doubt, the sections of Scripture that are cited to establish this doctrine deal with concrete historical settings in which God informs us that he squarely, that is immutably stands behind the sum-total of his perfections (Ps. 102:25-27; Is. 54:10; Mic. 7:19-20; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17; Hebr. 1:10-12; 13:8), his plan(s) of action (Ps. 33:11) as well as his Word (Ps. 89:34-37; Is. 40:21; 43:12; 46:10) that disclose and spell out both in detail. This applies even to the promise/threat of his relenting either unto good or his relenting unto evil (Jer. 18:8, 10). He promises or threatens a different course of action. But in all this as well, he reveals himself as the Immutable God. Not so incidentally, Scripture never asserts, especially regarding any of his perfections, that his immutability does not or could not possibly have an ontological dimension to it. Quite the contrary (Is. 41:4). Hence, we must be hard put to repudiate this. All in all, it is unconscionable to insist or even surmise that the eternal and uncreated Creator-God of Heaven and Earth would have an indelible stamp of essential changeability imprinted upon him. There is no shred of evidence to support this.⁴³⁹

The third set is prompted (1) by the direct and indisputable prohibition on God's part to pry into his "secrets," whether his ontological or epistemological ones (Deut. 29:29; Job 38-41), (2) by the immediate (Ps. 131:3) or eventual (Job 42:1-6) obedient response to this prohibition, as recorded in Scripture, and (3) by his corollary injunction to focus exclusively on a purposeful pursuit of an existence of holiness in obedience to his Law.

First, do the arguments of either the Mutabilists or the Immutabilists give any inkling that they were keenly aware of the incomprehensible nature of the complementarity of truth in the simultaneity of Divine Transcendence and Divine Immanence so as to caution them not to go a bridge too far in their description of them? Frankly, I have not detected much of the need for any extreme caution, to put it mildly, as it is mandated in Scripture.

Second, and more concretely, did either the recent Mutabilists or the scholastic Immutabilists, of whatever stripe, give any indication that they, whether consciously and intentionally or not, sought to penetrate the impenetrable? Of course, they did not. Otherwise they would have desisted.

Third, was this possibly due to a philosophical straight jacket that prompted them to come to conclusions that could violate God's prohibition? The answer to this must be varied. As to the Mutabilists, the answer may be mostly no and could be partly yes. All of them state that they feel constrained (in all exegetical honesty) to argue for Divine temporality and mutability on account of the biblical data. But at least one corroborates his position with the help of considerations based upon analytic philosophy. As to the Immutabilists, the answer could be mostly yes and may be partly no. To a greater or lesser extent all of them make their

⁴³⁹ For the Biblical ascription of "relenting" to God (Ex. 32:9-14; Joel 2:13-14; Jonah 4:1-2; Am. 7:1-6) in relationship to his immutability, see the helpful treatment in Frame, ST, 368-372. God has an immutable "covenantal policy" that explains his "relenting" (Jer. 18:5-10; in fact, in two ways). But at times there are "tacit (clearly understood) conditions" (Jonah 3:9) even in "categorical language" (Jonah 4:1-2) that do and can precipitate a change in God's course of action. At other times, it is a product of God's grace upon heartfelt prayer (Ex. 32:9-14; 2 Ki. 20:1-10; 2 Chron. 32:24; Am. 7:1-6). Remember Phelps, "If we suffer our faith to drop down from the lofty conception of prayer as having a lodgment in the very counsels of God by which the universe is swayed, the plain practicalness of prayer as the Scriptures teach it, and as the prophets and apostles and our Lord himself performed it, drops proportionally, and in that proportion our motive to prayer dwindles. Of necessity, then, our devotions become spiritless. Our supplications cannot go 'in a right line to God.' They become circuitous, timid, heartless. They may so degenerate as to be offensive, 'like the reekings of the Dead Sea.'" This is strong and passionate language. But it pertains to a crucial area of practical godliness and therefore deserves our heartiest and warmest "thank you" (Prov. 27:6).

appeal to Scripture as their starting point. But most of them utilize philosophical arguments to put their view in compelling concrete.

Of course, the ultimate question is whether the reasonings of both “parties” is not just theological, based on Scripture, but also or only theo-ontological, focusing foremost, if not exclusively, on out-of-bounds “essence,” whether in motivation or experimentation or both. In that case a clear-cut violation of God’s prohibition is nearly guaranteed, if not already factual. Now, it must be immediately admitted that Church History is awash with theo-ontological undertakings and edifices of that sort. If this were not a constant danger, God would not have warned against this in the Torah, the foundational “instruction” of the people of Israel (Once again, Deut. 29:29). And if this were not a regular occurrence, God would not have shown in a (seemingly somewhat wearisome?) book with many, partly condemned theo-ontological speeches that he did slap it down, and therefore necessarily would continue to do so (Once again Job 38-41).⁴⁴⁰

What comes quickly to mind are the Trinitarian and Christological controversies in the early Church. Eventually all theo-ontological traces were (miraculously?) removed in the official formulation of the Doctrines of the Church at the occasion of its great Councils, such as Chalcedon. So, why could or would theo-ontology not raise its ugly head in whole or in part, possibly throughout history, in the Church’s concentration and contemplation on “Theology Proper,” that, is on the Being of God, the sum-total of his perfections and his Tri-personality? Does the insistence upon Divine temporality, whether original or assumed, go an “arrogant” bridge too far? It certainly seems so. How about the deduction that all the Divine perfections must be essentially identical and therefore are synonymous in his a-temporal existence before creation, with time, space, and all, and in his a-temporal and supra-temporal existence, following this momentous event? Even in the non-polemic framework (Muller) of the Reformed orthodox some staunch Immutabilists would be hesitant to go to that length.

Thus far the language of this volume has been measured and somewhat provisional, if not tentative at points to make sure that the several views were clearly presented. But after “everything needful” now seems to be said, at least in the present context and from my perspective, it is time to wrap things up some, and by way of provisional conclusion, without throwing continuous caution to the wind, to formulate several substantive and hopefully helpful “takes.”

⁴⁴⁰ For the universally ever-present danger to go off the deep end, see Paul’s lament in Gal. 1:6. Paul seems to express his “amazement” so that no one in Church History would ever be amazed again, or at least would experience a “non-amazed amazement,” and express a “non-bewildered astonishment!”

XI. A Provisional Conclusion

This section presents a Provisional Conclusion, provisional to pave the way for a necessary Pastoral Appeal that is designed to have my “findings” properly digested by “Bereans,” whatever the outcome. But before I formulate my “takes” in this Conclusion, the following set of observations serves as necessary introduction.

First, to the extent that the complementarity of truth is not honored, whether by unregenerate or regenerate hearts, in a humble spirit of child-like surrender, a “contrastive” state of affairs immediately raises its ugly head, whatever the nature of the context or “state of affairs.” The context may be theoretical, a matter of philosophy, of theoretical physics, etc., etc., or practical, a matter of economics, of politics, etc., etc. Such “contrastive” state of affairs, which spells “warfare” of whatever sort, is inevitable across the board.

This is indisputably demonstrated throughout the History of Philosophy. Literally all its undertakings, as we saw, are based upon the contrast between universality and particularity. This contrast found its inevitable way, “by good and necessary consequence,” into the field of Theology whenever its Practitioners succumbed to the temptation to incorporate the basic tenets of the philosophical icon(s) of their day. Just to recognize what child-like submission to the Triune God would have accomplished! It would have opened a vista upon the Glory of the harmonious and peaceful co-existence of the incomprehensible archetypal Universality and Particularity in the Uncreated God who displays his ontological signature in the mirror image of the equally astounding co-existence of the ubiquitous ectypal universality and particularity in created reality, designed as universally harmonious and peaceful until sin created havoc in human and animal society. It would have stopped the History of Philosophy dead in its tracks before it had even started. It also would have precluded the infestation of what could (would) have been a Paradisial Theology. Instead, it produced the openly admitted quagmire of medieval scholasticism. This is emphatically not to claim that all its exegetical and systematic products missed the boat. Far from it! But it is to argue that it adopted, and so fell victim to an underlying and all-determining framework that could not but have deleterious effects. In fact, so deleterious for the Church in general and for the souls of men in particular that it literally took an earthquake type of rescue operation in the God-given Reformation to restore Gospel and Word sanity! All the possible “pluses” should not obscure the over-arching “minus” that was unambiguously destructive for the Body of Christ and its membership. All this is to say that an ivory-tower type of scholarship that overlooks or ignores the fundamental “minus” and fails or refuses to be “prophetic” in extolling “truth unto reproof, rebuke, correction, exhortation, and equipping in righteousness with all patience” (2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2) may well ask itself whether it is saddled with “blindness” that it must discard.

Second, any “contrastive” state of affairs often, if not invariably spawns “heroic” efforts on the waterfront of societal life, whether in the arenas of marriage, the family, the state, business, the church, etc., etc., or in the areas of politics, economics, science, education, etc., etc., to come to the rescue of a mankind that writhes in a million ways and to put an end to the perennial warfare and the destruction that it leaves in its wake. The problem is that such

a state of affairs, as the inevitable result of mankind's rebellion, imprisons it in a fundamental dialectic in which universality and particularity both presuppose and preclude each other. While its presupposition cries out for a synthesis, its preclusion did, does, and will turn every effort to arrive at this into a Sisyphus undertaking. After all, the incomprehensible universality-particularity polarity can never be comprehended. It is beyond the capacity and jurisdiction of man. Apostate philosophy is proof-positive. It never was, never is, never will, and never can be successful. Hence these efforts can never produce anything beyond a temporary band-aid.

Infested theology that incorporates fundamental contrastive tenets is not far behind. The "handmaidens" of both the triad of *univocity*, *analogy* and *equivocity* and the triad of the *via causalitatis*, *via negationis* and *via eminentiae* owe their existence to a contrastive view of reality and seek to bridge the gap of a pagan influenced Creator-creature distinction, all protestations to the contrary. As such it should have been banned from the outset. In succumbing to its Siren Song Medieval scholasticism did not just adopt a benign methodology. It welcomed a malignant content-virus. To the extent Protestant scholasticism incorporates this virus, it inherits a contrastive view of reality as well, whether consciously or not, will be victimized by a theo-ontological focus upon "essence" at the neglect or expense of the mandated New Covenantal "ethics" with the same deleterious effects for the Church and its many souls as well as for the World and its billions of inhabitants.

Frankly, it has all the earmarks that Martin, Phelps, Bavinck, and Beeke, at least instinctively, pleaded with God's people to be radically and totally child-like, never to penetrate the impenetrable, and never to violate the complementarity of God's radical Transcendence and God's total Immanence. In their writings they fight all approaches that are the offspring of contrastive views, whether consciously and intentionally or not, as a matter of life and death. This includes the handling of the Doctrine of Divine Immutability. Do not emphasize the Transcendence in the Creator-creature distinction to the point that it resembles separation. God becomes "The Wholly Other" (Martin, Phelps)! Do not emphasize the Immanence in that distinction to the point that it resembles identity. God becomes "a being among beings," "The Wholly or Partially Same" (Bavinck, Beeke)! Stay within your creaturely limitation and jurisdiction! Be Chalcedonian! Simply and joyfully confess the incomprehensible complementarity of truth, of Divine Transcendence and Immanence, both "without separation and without division" and "without confusion and without change." Stop wrangling about their ontological relationship with your finite mind. It won't work and it is forbidden territory to boot. Then put it, keep it, and treasure it in your regenerate heart, and you will find out (to your surprise?) that you do and will prioritize the only combat that counts, the fight with contrastive sin (Ps. 119:11) in the light of Christ's Triple Command!

You start "wrangling" or you continue "wrangling," with the mental skill set with which God graced you, with the energy God granted you, and in the time frame that God allotted you, whether in your centuries-long scholasticism or in your ongoing anti-scholasticism, and you can be sure that what really counts, the warfare against the unfathomable darkness of sin, and all that this entails, is put on the back-burner or goes by the board. The use of your skillset, of your energy, and your time is misdirected to the extent it compromises the hot pursuit of making disciples by means of the definitive Gospel of regeneration, justification and sanctification, the just as hot pursuit to baptize them in the name of the Triune God, and the equally hot pursuit of teaching disciples by means of the progressive Gospel of daily repentant faith, daily forgiveness and daily holiness.

In the throes of Medieval scholasticism, the Reformation woke up to this. So indisputably did Pietism and Puritanism in the throes of Protestant scholasticism. And so, must and will a Revival Church at every attempt to resuscitate a theo-ontological scholasticism that operates from a contrastive view, incorporates a questionable philosophical handmaiden, seeks to puzzle out incomprehensible as well as forbidden “essence” and does so at the neglect or expense of putting all the “eggs” of one’s heart, one’s mind, one’s will, one’s emotions, one’s enterprising skill set, one’s speaking, one’s actions full-time in the “basket” of Christ’s Triple Command as “the only thing needful.” If, and when these “eggs” ever hatch, Revival fires will have returned to burn the dross of darkness, to restore and reinvigorate the worship of the Triune God in the splendor of holiness and to reimpose his authority over the waterfront of life.

With this the way is paved for my “takes.” I divide them in five general, five specific, and five final “takes.” The first five present a cluster of foundational observations. They give both rise and shape to the second five. These cover my assessments. Based upon these assessments I make five recommendations.

My first general take is that the only way to arrive at God’s truth is to insist that Scripture, Scripture only, and Scripture in its totality is the sole *principium cognoscendi* and as such the final reference point as well as referee regarding any and all theologizing undertakings that seek to determine truth.⁴⁴¹ This is not to ignore or overlook, of course, that such undertaking must be rooted in faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, accompanied by incessant prayer, and respectful of the proper hermeneutical principles in order to be successful, that is, to be pleasing to God and to meet with his approval. For all this, consult the handbooks on Hermeneutics, especially the monograph of John Owen on this topic, which regrettably is rarely even quoted today, let alone put in practice.⁴⁴² At any rate, any kind of proposal to arrive at Divine Immutability or Mutability that is not exclusively based upon God’s Self-revelation in the Scripture as they are “creaturely” presented, must be shunned. Such proposal is always by definition empty and deceptive. This calls for a rejection of theo-ontological reasonings, *when* slavishly borrowed either directly from futile and deceptive philosophies or indirectly from gullible intermediaries to prop up biblical truth, or *when* imperialistically undertaken either in arrogance or in misguided zeal to pry into incomprehensible or forbidden territory aiming at that very same result. The ever-present danger, if not the inevitable outcome of all theo-ontological or theo-ontological undertakings, regardless their intentions, is that biblical truth will be compromised, truncated, warped or outdistanced by viruses or surrogates and therefore are always damaging to the Cause of God. This Cause is to extract a Church out of a bankrupt world that by its very operational existence would function as the displayed embodiment of the wisdom of God for the whole cosmos to take note (Eph. 3:10) and therefore should never use the bankrupt wisdom of the world to reach any if its mandated aims.

My second general take is that with Scripture as the first, the ever-continuing as well as the final word in all things pertaining to faith and practice, extreme caution must be taken in the deployment of philosophical concepts or methods to ground or bolster God’s truth in the recognition that apostate philosophies are empty in their concepts and deceitful in their methods, which stand in need of repentance, and therefore need to be “sanctified” through

⁴⁴¹ For the commitment to, understanding of, and impact of this *Principium Cognoscendi Theologiae* by the Reformers and post-Reformation Orthodoxy, see the extensive and thorough treatment of Muller, PRRD, II, 151-223.

⁴⁴² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, IV, 117-234.

the Word and prayer before ever being put to use. The open and uncritical praise or the possibly hidden and unconscious dependence upon an apostate philosopher as supposedly *the* philosopher, whether Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus in the past (Aquinas, Duns Scotus) or Kant, Hegel or Heidegger in the more recent times (Barth, Bultmann), is not a very good sign.⁴⁴³

My third general take is that all of God's truth is both simple and profound. Profundity without simplicity should raise flags as well as vice versa. It is a well-known fact that ancient as well as modern philosophies are increasingly complicated, undoubtedly due to their ever-continuing drive to arrive at the ever-beckoning Grand Theory of Everything that eluded their predecessors and for that reason called for their entrance in and exploration of ever-new territories (Acts 17:21) in an ever-growing sophistication.⁴⁴⁴ Theologies that follow in

⁴⁴³ It is telling to hear Fesko, RA, 143-149, argue with a good deal of persuasiveness that Aquinas' conscious praise of and open dependence upon the realist philosophy of Aristotle does not differ much from Van Til's conscious use of and hidden dependence upon the idealist philosophy of Hegel. I am afraid that there is "more truth" to both assessments. More truth than the adherents of Aquinas, including Fesko, are willing to remedy, and more truth than most Van Tillians are willing to admit. Whether this a conscious reality or not, it appears that the Siren Song of "The False Prophet" (Rev. 13:11-14; 19:20) with his counterfeit and fallacious philosophies and ideologies, which produce erroneous and deceptive worldviews, whether in whole or in parts, has a much greater capacity to impact even the finest Christian minds, than is usually understood or acknowledged. The history of theology has to an all too great extent been a history of infestation. The Church was often saved by the bell, such as admittedly in Chalcedon. At any rate, if staunch minds, like Van Til, cannot (altogether) escape this Siren Song, "heaven help us." It definitely, if not definitively puts all of us on red alert not to be "hoodwinked!"

⁴⁴⁴ For this, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 87-111. In Plotinus Ancient Philosophy had run its course and in Martin Heidegger Modern Philosophy. They are philosophical "Titans!" Their brainpower was awesome, and their writings brilliant in their inventiveness to open new avenues and new vistas to arrive at their objective. But they are also the height of sophistication and complication. Innumerable books and articles have been written by second-tier thinkers after years of study to decipher the intricacies of their thinking. More often than not, the end-result was new controversies in interpretation and added confusion about their message. The genius of their philosophy is beyond question. In fact, it is intoxicating to enter the labyrinth of their thinking and to explore their near titanic efforts to arrive at their Mount Olympus and assume god-like status with the ultimate say about the essence of reality. I recognized this in his devotees and experienced the temptation myself in my immersion in the philosophical output of Martin Heidegger. By comparison, the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ looked bland to the Athenian Stoics and Epicureans, nothing but the contribution of an unsophisticated "blabbermouth" who managed to attract the label of a fool to boot (Acts 17:18, 32). They were totally blind to the simple profundity of the towering person and work of Christ who as the embodiment of the fullness of God (Col. 2:9) and the repository of all the treasures of Divine wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3) put their blindness and its erudite and complicated products on open display in his cross and resurrection (Lk. 24:46-47; Acts 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:3-4), disarming all rulers and authorities and putting them to shame in his triumph over them in the process (Col 2:15). Apostate philosophers in their admittedly brilliant sophistication nevertheless fail miserably in their ever-recurring Sisyphus labor. So, opt for the simply profound and profoundly simple Gospel however bland and foolish this may seem (1 Cor. 1:18). For it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) as Paul found out despite the snickers and the ridicule that he encountered on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:34). Plotinus and Martin Heidegger are only two samples of a brilliantly sophisticated but ultimately empty "handwriting on the wall." But it does raise the question, whether the Medieval scholastics with their undoubtedly iconic luminaries, such as Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Occam, were not too far behind. No one seems to be able to publish the final word about their admittedly erudite and complicated contributions. At any rate, let us never forget, once more, that rather than advancing the simple profundity of the Gospel they were, in fact, *had* to be shoved aside and replaced by this Gospel in the Reformation with the millions of conversions that followed in its wake. It may well be that the Reformation began to stall when Post-Reformation scholastics, while retaining their Reformation orthodoxy, followed in the footsteps of their Medieval predecessors, which eventually called for the Pietistic and Puritan movements. I can hardly forget that John Owen told his King that he would gladly forego all his writings to be able to convey the Gospel like the Tinker of Bedford, John Bunyan. The simple profundity of the latter may well have had

the methodological footsteps of apostate philosophy and are caught up in this trap, essentially take the road to “no-where” which invariably did, does and will obscure the simplicity of the Gospel and inflict irreparable harm upon an unsuspecting, if not gullible Church (2 Cor. 11:3). At the same time, theologies that overlook, ignore, or discard that “the ever to be renewed mind really matters” end up with a spiritual starvation diet that has the same calamitous result (Rom. 12:2; 2 Pet. 3:16).

My fourth general take is that the combination of a heartfelt and authentic surrender to Scripture as the exclusive *principium cognoscendi* and an insightful and wholesale departure from the complicated sophistication of apostate philosophizing goes hand in hand with the embrace of the complementarity of truth wherever this is in unmistakable evidence in God’s Word, or for that matter in created reality. This complementarity with its royally admitted contradictory poles on the creaturely level never did, never does, and never will fit in the finite and tiny human brain. Therefore, to try to “wrest” it in there, despite this is unmitigated human *hubris*, whether substantively (unbelievers) or methodologically (believers) so. In either instance it is to eat of the Tree of Autonomous Knowledge and Conduct all over again. Hence it is always destructive, at times suicidal, sooner or later deadly, and stands in need of a Job-like repentance. But complementary truth fits snugly in the regenerate heart which recognizes it as incontestably and admirably harmonious on the level of the Creator. In case of either substantive or methodological delinquency, repentance is the only divine instrument of grace to get it lodged there. When the heart through or in rebirth purposefully wins out over the essentially arrogant mind, it will have learned to be deadly afraid of any, and all kinds of pride to explain both the unexplainable and the forbidden, denounce it, and stay away from it. Instead, it will revere and worship the unexplainable God and all his incomprehensible or withheld secrets, whether of the ontological or epistemological sort in an utterly childlike fashion. Without the evidential latter entrance into the Kingdom is blocked, according to Jesus (Lk. 18:17). That this applies to elite thinkers as well should be a no-brainer.

My fifth general take is that the theological enterprise, in order to avoid chasing and passing on dead capital, must always strive to end up with what we already encountered as “Truth-for-Life,” “Walk in the Word” or “Learning unto *Living*” by the Spirit of Grace as its sole objective under God and to his glory.⁴⁴⁵ This means concretely that it must serve

a greater saving and sanctifying impact than the scholarly volumes of his undoubtedly illustrious and properly revered contemporary!

⁴⁴⁵ Rather recently the homiletical objective of every message has been said to present and for the audience to get “The Big Idea.” Shorn of all else, this is essentially “A Bad Idea,” if not “The Worst Possible One.” It will allow, if not encourage folks to store it in the refrigeration system of their mind and go home to have their steak or chicken dinner while enjoying their coffee or their root beer, that is, to be happy with business as usual. A Century or two ago the homiletical recommendation was vastly superior, if not right on the biblical money. Present “The *Awesome Carefully Defined Truth*, fully conjoined to the *Momentous Action* required by it,” and don’t go to dinner until all of you “get it,” *all* of it, so as to treasure it in the life-mission control center of your heart, determined to put it on open and active display (Ps. 119:11). See for the latter R. L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), esp. 30, 40, 52. Of course, if John 15:5 is any indication, this “display” cannot and will not be forthcoming until “textual truth-into-life” is deposited and found in Jesus, who then is embraced as such for that “textual-truth-into-life” to spring to life! Any audience who wishes for this to occur at every “opening of Scripture,” and to that end “thirsts” for Jesus, “comes” to Jesus, and “drinks” of Jesus to “flow” the text from Jesus through the Spirit (John 7:37-39), will undoubtedly “clamor” for the Lord’s Supper after every message to “eat and drink” him spiritually to that very end! There is clearly “order in the house” in Acts 2 when 3000 converts flocked to the (daily?) Assemblies to

God's "game plan" after he in and through his ordained "fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) moved aggressively on from "leaving the nations 'stew' in their ignorance" (Acts 17:30) to having his Son bracket all of World History with the towering mandate of his awesome Grand Triple Command (Mt. 28:19-20). From that moment and onward the sole and all-encompassing purpose for his Church would be "to make disciples of all nations" through the New Covenantal Gospel of the Triune God and following Baptism in his Trinitarian name "to teach them to observe all his commands," as recorded in the infallible and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Now on to my five assessments, in reverse order.

First, it is a rarity, if it ever occurred at all, that a theologian prefaced the product of his thinking, whether in word or in print, with the reminder that it was ultimately designed to urge and equip his audience or readers to an ever-greater obedience to reach out to unbelievers in Evangelism with the Gospel and to urge and enable believers to exhort their fellow believers to pursue and display an ever-increasing sanctification according to the Word. All this with the further comment that failure to accomplish this mission is either due to their own shortfall, whether in focused precision, in persuasive language, or even in subtle unbelief and possibly in deep hidden fearfulness, or due to the shortfall of their audiences or readers, whether in open refusal, in a questioning attitude, in a basic indifference, in a habitual laziness, or even in a failing faith and possibly in an underlying fear as well. That a shortcoming in either case both can and must be remedied, stands to eminent reason to all devoted Bible readers. Scripture pictures in graphic language not only Spirit-filled leaders who "fit the bill" in getting their message across both in clear, bold, and commanding word and as fully functioning and effective models, but also exhibits their Spirit-filled spontaneous disciples who do and must astound everyone in their readiness and eagerness to pursue numerical as well as spiritual growth and see this be graced with amazing successes (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; Hebr. 6:12; 13:7; 1 Pet. 3:13 as well as Acts 8:4ff; 11:19ff). There is every reason for the "Antioch" model to keep us spellbound until it humbles us and make us cry out to God to grace us with "a double portion" of his Spirit, or possibly even more appropriate for us to cease neglecting, grieving, quenching and insulting the Holy Spirit in repentance until the torrents of living water begin to flow either again or for the first time, and turn deserts into fertile fields (Is. 32:15), cemeteries into maternity wards (Ezek. 37:9-10, 12-14) and Dead Seas into a fresh water-lakes (Ezek. 47:8-10) by the grace of God, whatever our cost!

Second, it is an equal rarity to see theologians explicitly and arduously insist on ever honoring the complementarity of truth which enjoys a prodigious presence in Scripture and see them extend loud and stern warnings against overlooking, ignoring or even sinning against it. This, of course, would serve to "chain" the intellect to make every single thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5; *fides quadrat intellectum*) and to shun any and every effort Icarus-like to move beyond the ontological boundary of its own finite reach by seeking to enter incomprehensible territory or to outdistance the epistemological borderline of its own limited jurisdiction by entering forbidden territory. It also would counter the ever-present temptation to eat from the apparently attractive but prohibited "Tree" in order independently to determine one's own Knowledge and Conduct. To be sure,

hear God's Word, to talk it over together until they all "got it," subsequently to take a beeline to Jesus both in the Lord's Supper and in prayer, that is, to make a twofold "pitstop" in heaven for the "fuel" needed to adorn the "digested" truth with the textual godliness (Acts 2:42).

the presence of “mystery” is mostly, if not near-universally recognized, acknowledged, and professed, often insistently so. The relationship of the Divine and human nature in the one Person of Christ and that of Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility are two of these mysteries. But it is also all too frequently accompanied by a failure to pinpoint its location. That became evident in the Christological and Arminian controversies. Since the complementarity of truth implies the existence of two “poles” that cannot have a lodging place in, in fact, are contradictory to the tiny brain of man, to recognize mystery at that point is indispensable. The refusal to do so has done incalculable damage to the Church in the 5th Century when the dual personhood of Christ (Nestorius) and the amalgamation of his two natures in one (Eutychus) were alternately propounded and in the 15th Century and onward when the libertarian free-will position (Arminius) took an ever-increasing hold. Enough said about the ever-present danger to underestimate the sin against the complementarity of truth in its essence and its outcome.

Third, it is also questionable whether theologians sufficiently raise the issue that simplicity and profundity resemble a Siamese twin and that therefore both must be in copious evidence. This is more than an academic issue. The apostle combines the simplicity of the Gospel with its purity (2 Cor. 11:3). This may well indicate that the failure to meet the simplicity-profundity test is at least partly responsible for the lack of consequent obedient action. When a trumpet gives a sound that is either uncertain, without clear simplicity, or confusing to the hearers, too sophisticated, nothing much can be expected to happen in its wake.⁴⁴⁶

It is a well-known fact that many ancient as well as modern philosophers are extremely difficult to fathom. Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus in ancient times come to mind. Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger in modern times. Second-tier thinkers cover their publications, resembling at times an army of ants, to determine the sense of what is offered. The iconic philosophical luminaries are undoubtedly brilliant. But they have three strikes against them. They are “empty.” The impressive edifice of their thinking invariably ended up in self-contradiction. Further, they are “deceitful.” Sooner or later, they are exposed as self-contradictory and are discarded together with their adherents whose “messianic” hopes were rudely trounced. But the main strike may well be that in their apostate profundity they forewent a healthy and wholesome simplicity.

Did this “profundity” virus infect theological icons as well. Should Thomas Aquinas in Medieval and Karl Barth in Modern times come to mind? Just like their philosophical exemplars, who were pursued (at best) like handmaidens but took over in their mastery, they attracted myriads of would-be interpreters, and all too often stand accused of being self-contradictory.⁴⁴⁷ Apart from a selective present day following, both Thomism and

⁴⁴⁶ Mastricht, TPT, II, 148-152, esp. 150-152, calls for simplicity of heart (Ps. 73:1; Ezek. 11:19; Mt. 10:16; 2 Cor. 1:12; 7:1; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 1:20-21; 1 John 3:3) and purity of life (Ps. 5:6; 25:21; Prov. 11:20; 2 Cor. 1:12; Col. 3:22-23) based upon the simplicity of God. He is one of the (few?) authors who recognizes that all doctrine has an “active ingredient” as its inescapable corollary. See for this also, Turretin, IET, I, 20-23.

⁴⁴⁷ As quoted in Fesko, RA, 23, Anthony Burgess (d. 1644) warned that “the light of Nature” should always be and remain a “handmaid, never a mistress.” He further states that when its “light” either turns into “darkness” or constitutes “darkness,” it should not even be a “handmaid.” Incidentally, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 221-222, argues that “we would do well not to exaggerate the differences between Aquinas and Barth. Both engage in conceptual analysis and make ministerial use of philosophical reason.” So much for the view that Barth’s theology is free from philosophical blemishes. In fact, Barth is Kantian to the core. He is as Kantian as Aquinas is Aristotelian.

Barthianism has had their heyday. But the indisputable lack of the simplicity and purity of the New Covenantal Gospel took its toll in stifling ecclesiastical and societal barrenness (Aquinas) or in a profligate ecclesiastical and societal secularization (Barth). The barrenness inherently cried out for the Reformation Gospel. But today's secularization is still silently looking to be rescued. Apparently, the Church has not risen to the much-needed occasion of aggressively pursuing Christ's Triple Command in an Early Church fashion with a Pauline vigor, spawned by Holy Spirit Revival fire!

Fourth, this makes it dubious that the Medieval and Classic Immutabilists as well as the Mutabilists of recent days were able to withstand the sucking power of apostate philosophies, put together by men with a superior intelligence and an elite intellectual capacity. It is an indisputable fact that throughout its history the Church has listened again and again to the numerous Siren Songs that sought to entice them, whether of Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus in Ancient times, or Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger in modern times. The admitted bottom line is that neither the scholastic Immutabilists, nor the more recent Mutabilists can point to *explicit* Biblical data that would warrant their views.⁴⁴⁸ This does not necessarily disenfranchise their conclusions. But it should certainly give us a good deal of pause for some serious thought. Whatever the final verdict should or must be, their conclusions are all posited "by good and necessary consequence," without giving much thought, if any, about their permissibility and admissibility.

Fifth, and lastly, all this together may well make it doubtful that the Reformation watchword of *Sola Scriptura* is honored as the sole and ultimate *principium cognoscendi*. Medieval scholasticism was not bound to this, in as much as it sought to honor both Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition.⁴⁴⁹ The Reformed Immutability scholastics and the more recent Mutabilists may protest that the Reformation watchword was in full control in their theologizing. But it is quite clear that they both may well add a second source of knowledge, when they introduce an unlimited "by good and necessary consequence" rule. This rule is questionable rule *unless* the adjectives "permissible" and "admissible" are added, "by good, necessary, permissible and admissible consequence." Scripture *demand*s this addition, when it forbids humans to pry into "the secrets" of God (Deut. 29:29).

Did theologians who conclude either to the *essential identity* of all God's perfections or to his (*added*) *temporality* honor this? I am not convinced, as I explain further in the next and final Section. The "at least partial proof of the pudding" is in the proportionate failure incessantly and vigorously to insist on the hot pursuit of Christ's Triple Command, also as the crowning piece and crowning purpose of all theologizing, and to model this in person as "the only thing needful." To enlarge on this once more, it is recorded in Scripture that "the only thing needful" is to *sit at the feet of Jesus*, and obediently to listen to him in keen and

⁴⁴⁸ Specifically, the view of the Immutabilists that archetypally all God's attributes are necessarily "identical," and the view of the Mutabilists that ectypally God is necessarily (partly) "temporal."

⁴⁴⁹ For the view of the Reformers on "the authority of the fathers," see Muller, PRRD, II, 340-345, and for the relationship of Scripture and tradition according to the Reformers and their orthodox offspring in partial but nevertheless fundamental contrast to the Medievals, see Muller, PRRD, II, 345-355, esp. 355, "The emphasis on the sufficiency of Scripture tended to become a Protestant possession while emphasis on the equality of Scripture and tradition and on the ability of tradition to 'speak in the silence of Scripture,' became an almost exclusive property of Roman Catholicism." All this went with the understanding that "Protestantism retained tradition as a support of interpretation, secondary in status to the text of Scripture" and "several Roman Catholic theologians ... retained the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture," even where they questioned its clarity. See for "Scripture and tradition in late Medieval debate," Muller, PRRD, II, 51-56.

submissive attention (Lk. 10:39, 42) eventually (in order?) lovingly to *wash* his feet in ardent and self-effacing devotion (John 12:3). In the first instance Jesus tells all believers for all practical purposes (Martha) “to leave the eager ‘listener’ (Mary) alone” (Lk. 10:341-42). In the second instance he tells all unbelievers for all practical purposes (Judas) “to leave the rapt ‘foot-washer’ (Mary) alone” (John 12:7). No interference or roadblocks permitted! Truly to sit at the feet of Jesus today is to hear his Grand Triple Command purposely to do the Greater Works promised and mandated by Jesus (John 14:12). If we come short of this, at least our hearts should break (Bonar). Truly to wash Christ’s feet today is to obey this Command (John 15:14-15). It is the first, last, only, exclusive, and perpetual Command he gives his Church to hear and to obey. This “analogical truth-for-life” appears unavoidable “by good and necessary consequence.” Hence, it calls for self-examination on the part of all Immutabilists and Mutabilists alike. Is the “doctrine” they advocate “truth-unto-well-defined-life?” If not, the end-product is “bare theology,” and the “barren teapot” rules. If so, it must be explicitly spelled out.⁴⁵⁰ But it must also cover the waterfront of life.⁴⁵¹ That doubles us back to the Threefold Command of the Commander-in-Chief.

Now on to my final two Sections. So long as this volume was in the process of collecting all the necessary data, it was still a work under construction. Hence my observations thus far were often presented in a probing and provisional, be it “pointing” manner. But now all the issues are on the table, as far as I am concerned. This sets the stage to formulate some final conclusions. This is done in the form of a Pastoral Appeal for two reasons. It seeks to display sensitivity to the several views, especially if their advocates go all out to take Scripture utterly serious as the sole *principium cognoscendi*. It also seeks to build bridges to ensure that believers, who love the Lord and his Triple Command, are able to labor jointly in combating the terrible darkness that prevails outside the Kingdom of light with the awesome everlasting New Covenant Gospel that is promised by the Father, personified in the Son and personalized by the Holy Spirit! Too often Churches have splintered, unaware of, if not disinterested in the ministerial ebbs and tides that would follow. Some rifts are inevitable (1 Cor. 11:19). But may the Lord have mercy upon us so as not to embark upon rifts that are not necessary, but rather turn us into believers who “are of the same intent, maintain the same love, are united in the same spirit, pursue the same purpose, humbly regarding others more eminent than ourselves” (Phil. 2:2-3; see also Rom. 12:9-18).

⁴⁵⁰ Maastricht, TPT, I and II, masterfully and like clockwork treats every doctrine under four headings and in four parts, the exegetical, dogmatic, elenctic (refuting), and practical part. Without the last part any treatment is a travesty. See also TPT, I, 71-73, 86-98, 107-112.

⁴⁵¹ I have not encountered any authors who spell out, let alone emphasize, the implication or application of the doctrinal truths they treat as this relates to the first part of Christ’s Triple Command. In this Maastricht is no exception.

XII. A Pastoral Appeal (I)

It may well be that the present volume thus far has produced some unease, if not an incipient protest on the part of both scholastic Immutabilists and the more recent Mutabilists. Possibly such unease will at least be mitigated, and such protest be softened when they ponder some searching and hopefully sobering pastoral questions that I pose in this Section and some hopefully helpful concluding “theoretical-practical” delineations of Divine Immutability and Simplicity in the next one.

The first one is directed to the classic Immutabilists!

On the day of Judgment everyone will see his or her book opened. As a result, all mouths will be stopped. The damned will recognize that their eternal lot is fully deserved as an inevitable display of God’s impeccable justice. The saved will equally recognize that their eternal lot is fully underserved as the immaculate exhibition of his incredible grace. But the Judgment serves a much, much more glorious function as well. When the content of each book is “splashed” on the screen of the universe for everyone to observe, not only God’s justice and God’s grace come into view, but the sum-total of his perfections as much as this is “creaturely” possible are exhibited as well. His perfections in his distinction to his creation, his perfections in his authority over his creation, and his perfections in his interrelationship with his creation.

Spotlight XI

The Attributes of God: A Classification

To classify the Divine perfections is far from an easy undertaking and may never produce a complete consensus. For the several proposals, see Beeke, RST, 539-546. I suggest the following three-fold descriptive classification in which I seek to group the perfections together as organically as possible. This approach leaves the divisions somewhat fluid at times. At any rate, where Scripture does not pinpoint precise delineations, Systematic Theology must restrain itself from becoming speculative.

I. The Focus upon the Essential nature of God in *Distinction* to his Creation.

1. In a more absolute sense (without a mirror image in creation):

a. Aseity (self-existence: self-sustained; self-sufficient; all blessed; John 5:26, Acts 17:25; simplicity; 1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16)

b. Infinity (eternal; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:1-4; 102:25-27; Is. 57:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; immense; 1 Ki. 8:27; Is. 66:1).

2. In a more relative sense (with a partial mirror image in creation):

a. Immutability (being and word; Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:11, 29; Jer. 18:7ff.; Ps. 33:11; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17)

b. Incorporeality (spirituality; John. 4:24; Deut. 4:12, 15); invisibility; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16).

II. The Focus upon the Essential Nature of God in his *Authority* over his Creation.

1. Control

a. Supremacy (plan, will, decisions, actions, etc.; Ps. 2:9; 1 Chr. 29:11-12; Job 23:13; Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:9, 21:1; Eph. 1:11; inclusive of sovereignty; Is. 46:10, Ps. 135:6)

b. "Totality:" omnipotence (Dan. 4:35; Mk. 14:62; Ps. 62:1; 89:11-12; Hebr. 1:3); omnipresence; Ps. 139:7-10; Prov. 15:3; Jer. 23:14; Acts 17:27-28)

2. "Insight:" omniscience (all-knowing; Ps. 139:2-4, all-seeing; 1 Chr. 28:9; Is. 40:27-28; 1 Sam. 2:3, Ezek. 11:5; John 21:17; Hebr. 4:13; *foreknowing* (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29-30; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2); all-wise (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Dan. 2:20; Rom. 11:33).

III. The Focus upon the Essential Nature of God in his *Interrelationship* to his Creation

1. More vis-a-vis Himself: "Rectitude."

a. Holiness (awesome purity; Ex 15:11; Rev. 15:4; 2 Chron. 20:21; Ps. 89:35; 103:1; 145:17; Is. 6:3; Rom. 7:12; Rev. 4:8; 15:4; see also Ps. 119:67,71,92; Rom. 8:28-29; .

b. Righteousness (irreproachable morality; Gen. 18:25; Ps. 97:2; 145:17; Dan. 9:7; Rev. 16:5,7; reflects the standard of holiness in the being, and the law of God, as the reflection of that being.

c. Justice (absolute fairness in distributive (apportioning) or punitive (restraining) justice (Jam. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:6; Rom. 3:26), the crown of divinely applied holiness.

d. Truth (veracity and reliability; Deut. 32:4; John 15:1; 17:17; 1 John 5:6; Rom. 3:4) in inter-speaking and inter-acting (Dan. 4:37; John 14:6, 17; 16:13; Rom. 3:7; 1 Thess. 2:13).

e. Wrath (retributory anger, the application of holiness to the unrighteous determines his vengeance and their destination (Deut. 32:39-41,43; Ps. 89:35; 95:11).

2. More vis-a-vis his Creatures: "Goodness of God (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 52:1; 73:1; 119:68; 145:7,9; Mt. 19:7; Mk. 10:18; Rom. 2:4-5).

a. Liberality (God's goodness in bountifully providing for His creatures (Ps. 145:15-16). See also Rom. 2:4 for its purpose and Mt. 5:44 for its pattern.

b. Mercy (God's goodness in relieving the misery of fallen creatures at their wit's end (Ps. 136:11; Lk.18:13; Hebr. 45:16). See also Ps. 57:10 for its greatness, Ex. 33:19 for its sovereignty, Ps. 103:17 for its perpetuity to the God fearing, and Jam. 2:13 for its pattern).

c. Love (God's goodness in restoring His communion to rebellious creatures (Eph. 2:4-6). See also Deut. 7:7-8 for its freeness; Rom. 9:1 for its sovereignty; John 3:16 for its scope; John 10:15 and 17:2,9 for its objects; Jer. 31:3 for its perpetuity; Rom. 8:34-39 for its effectiveness; 1 John 4:19 for its source; Rom. 5:8 for its incredible gift; and Jer. 32:38-40 as well as 1 John 4:17 for its God-centered aim of holiness).

d. Grace (God's goodness in bridging the rift of sin to undeserving creatures (Eph. 2:8-9). See also 2 Tim. 1:9 for its perpetuity; Rom. 3:24 for its freeness; Ex. 33:19 for its sovereignty; and 1 Cor. 6:9-11 for its scope).

e. Patience (God's goodness in delaying the punishment of the offending creatures (Nah. 1:2-3). See 2 Pet. 3:9 for its purpose; and Col. 3:12 for its pattern).

f. Faithfulness (God's goodness in dealing predictably with all his creatures (Deut. 7:9). See also Ps. 36:5; 89:36-37 for the model (God himself); Jer. 18:7-10; Ps. 119:138; 1 Thess. 5:23; Hebr. 10:23 for the standard (his covenant word and promises); 2 Tim. 2:13 for God's persistence in spite of man's unfaithfulness; Ps. 119:75 for his stern measures; and Is. 30:18; 40:31; Ps. 37:34; 40:1 for the ground for waiting upon God).

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All of us with our short and local life span do experience only the tiniest sliver of time and space. But in the universal Grand End-Time exhibition that covers the total history of mankind, corporately and individually, we will come face to face with an awesome spectacle of the breathtaking fullness of God's multi-colored glory, the all-encompassing and all-exceeding luster of which will be unforgettable throughout eternity both among the damned and among the saved. To miss out on it in utter darkness may well be one the greatest punishments the damned will experience. To be exposed to it in the uninterrupted light of the presence of God may well be the greatest privilege for the saved.

Now the question! When adoring and worshipping our God for all eternity in the *multi-colored* glory of the sum-total of his perfections, what possible function would there be for a mental conclusion that in the essence of God “the exquisite rainbow of colors” does not really “exist?” Why not let incomprehensible mystery be incomprehensible mystery, *and leave it at that*, and why not start immediately in the here and now, and until further orders in glory, to make the Triple Command of his Son the only thing that counts? In fact, why not let the reality of incomprehensible and unenterable mystery both finetune and enlarge our worship, already today? In other words, let “without univocity” and “without equivocity” be the intermediate “temporal” and remain the perpetual “eternal” watchwords which will pave the way for the highest possible worship of our 100% transcendent and utterly incomprehensible God in his 100% immanent and utterly, even if not fully or exhaustively knowable presence.

I cannot but appreciate and embrace the sentiment that comes to expression by the theologian who in the context of “The Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility” issue “places himself in the company of those who ‘take pride in their ignorance and believe these two things--God’s decree and human freedom--without worrying about how to reconcile the two. This is the safest solution, and the one we follow, because all other views leave great difficulties.’”⁴⁵² In fact, all other views are basically “arrogant” theo-ontological efforts to penetrate the impenetrable, and at least to map the impenetrable to a basically indefinite degree of intelligibility. Like Icarus, the closer the approach to the unapproachable, the quicker the downfall and the demise.

I am also intrigued by Zanchi, the strict Immutabilist of the 15th Century whom we encountered already. He may well be like the handwriting on the wall. It appears that he wrestles with “the far-reaching consequences of Aquinas’s doctrine of divine simplicity.” With Aquinas he “endorses a strong notion of simplicity,” all right, “by stating the absolute identity of all divine attributes (in the *essential* nature of God).” But, according to one commentator, in contrast to Aquinas who adamantly denies this, he introduces at the same time, “according to our understanding” a “structural order” in God’s attributes. Since he defines it as an *ordo naturalis*, Zanchi (allegedly) attributes such “order” as natural to God, that is, to his *essential* nature. This, of course, contradicts and nullifies an “absolute identity.” The logical conclusion of this (perceptive?) commentator is that as a result the scholastic “simplicity doctrine (in this instance) becomes in fact theologically idle and inoperative.” After all, this doctrine “does not (and cannot) supervise any more our understanding of, and hence our language about God. Our concepts and words are withdrawn from its critical guidance and become immune to its regulations. As a consequence, our God-talk tends to become univocal and the (earlier mentioned) specific negativity of theology which (Zanchi)

⁴⁵² Thus, the Genevan Theologian Benedict Pictet (1655-1724), quoted by Willem J. Van Asselt, “Scholasticism in the Time of Late Orthodoxy,” in, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 188. As we saw above, three centuries later we were given the same excellent advice by K. J. Popma. “Absence of the knowledge of the humanly incomprehensible is our glory, which results in worship. Refusal to embrace this in total contentment is our shame, which requires radical repentance (Job 42:1ff).” This comports with Calvin’s statement that “by God’s silence (pertaining to his “secret counsel”) he reminds us that mystery which our minds cannot comprehend ought to be reverently adored, and that he thus checks the wantonness of human curiosity” (Quoted in Muller, PRRD, III, 440). Of course, they should have made it clear that the regenerate heart functions as welcome simultaneous repository of all complementary truths! Together with the beckoning *and* promising evangelistic and apologetic implications thereof!

stresses elsewhere in his doctrine of God, loses its intensity.”⁴⁵³ Is this interpretation that presents Zanchi as “a house divided” tenable? If so, the confusion at the edges of the scholastic simplicity doctrine is tangible.

At any rate, so long as “Aristotle/Plotinus” is in the theo-ontological saddle there can never be “worshipful pride (read: humility) in ignorance” in the face of the incomprehensible secrets of God. It will always display an Icarus-like arrogance in attempting to reach the unreachable to whatever degree, whether consciously and intentionally or not, all protestations to the contrary. It is high time that the Church will officially decree that content-wise the reign of so-called “legitimate consequences” must come or be brought to a halt as impermissible and inadmissible *the very moment* it encounters God’s sovereign “say-so” regarding his incomprehensible “be-so” and (to-be) hidden “do-so,” and must insist that this reign may not and does not exceed and transgress the boundary of its jurisdiction! It must do so both to curtail the near boundless wasteful and debilitating theo-ontological preoccupation to chase “essence” and to clear the way for a massive time and energy investment in the “ethics” of Christ’s Triple Command as the focal point of both world and church history and, candidly, as “the only thing needful” in a world of prevailing spiritual death of rebellion, guilt and corruption that faces “the wrath to come.” In the light of this it was, is, and will be unconscionable to have spent, do spend or future spend massive resources to erect imposing foundation-less edifices in dead-end streets. This is the total and should be the exclusive preoccupation of the world only, which is to be shunned by the Church!

But there is one more bridge to cross. We heard both Martin and Bavinck speak about a “kinship” between God and his people in both word (language) and deed (action). Anyone who analyzes this through the lens of either the “triad” of the three ways, the *via causalitatis*, the *via negationis* and the *via eminentiae*, or the “triad” of *univocity*, *equivocity* and *analogy* runs into serious trouble. In fact, it is to embark upon a disastrous dead-end street where either denial or uncertainty reigns. The basic reason is simple. Both “triads” are morphed by apostate philosophy. To underscore this once more, until it sinks in (?), all apostate philosophy aims to synthesize the one and the many, or the universal-particular polarity. Upon apostasy this polarity turns into a dialectic, in which both poles both presuppose and exclude each other simultaneously. Their mutual presupposition serves as an open invitation to synthesize them. Their mutual exclusion spells permanent contrast and so trumps every effort to arrive at a synthesis. Harmony may ever continue to beckon at the horizon. But is an ever-elusive objective. It retreats with the horizon. It is this “contrastive” reality that covers the waterfront of life and characterizes both “triads as well.”⁴⁵⁴ Hence the dead-end street.

In terms of the first “triad,” take “the love of God” as *one* example.⁴⁵⁵ We are told to attribute “love” to God since human love as an effect must have Divine love as a cause (*via*

⁴⁵³ So emphatically, Harm Goris, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 139.

⁴⁵⁴ Long, PSTG, 367.

⁴⁵⁵ See for an excellent survey on “The Love of God” in Reformed Theology, Muller, PRRD, III, 561-569, esp. 562, 565, 567. In a typical scholastic fashion, the love of God *ad intra* (inter-Trinitarian) is distinguished from his love *ad extra* (toward his creatures). This, however, did not prevent orthodoxy to come up with a threefold description, if not definition of God’s love, ignoring at this point the Thomist “analogy” type of thinking that devalues all creaturely language. Gratefully Biblical concreteness won out! But it is even more gratifying to hear Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), “echoing Calvin, caution (folks) that ‘the scholastics’ were much more interested in searching into the hidden depths of the Trinity and discussing the love of God *ad intra* than in interpreting what Scripture had to say concerning

causalitatis). But this “love” of God cannot possibly be compared to human “love” (*via negativa*). It transcends it by a country mile (*via eminentiae*). In all candor, when we do proclaim “the love of God,” is this really all that we are or should be telling our audiences, apart from the (passing strange) exhortation to adore the incomprehensible mystery of God’s unknown and unknowable love? Frankly, I do not attribute to God an at bottom elusive and therefore basically unknown and unknowable love as the conclusion of some philosophical reasoning (*via causalitatis*). I proclaim it as known and knowable Scriptural truth that is conveyed in definable language. Besides, it is God’s love that is reflected in humanity as created in his image. God is not presented in Scripture “like creature man” (subtly or not so subtly anthropomorph?), subsequently to be described with the assistance of philosophical tools “from the bottom up,” such as, the *via negativa* and the *via eminentiae*, to be shorn of his all too creaturely features, if not to be “elevated” above all creaturely language (*a la* Dionysius). No, we are presented in Scripture as being “like God,” gloriously theomorph,⁴⁵⁶ and therefore to be addressed from the revealed top down. Bottom line? Both the *via negativa* and the *via eminentiae* put God’s love into the stratosphere and turn it into unbreathable thin air. They are spawned by a contrastive ontology that admittedly requires a contrastive epistemology in which the “No,” who and what God is not, trumps the “Yes,” who and what God is.

In terms of the second “triad,” both *univocity* and *equivocity* are summarily ruled out. There is neither total identity (versus *univocity*) of, nor total separation (versus *equivocity*) between Divine love and human love. Of course, this produces uncertainty. But pinning one’s hope upon analogy is not much of a solution. It turns anything to which it is attached, all

God’s love.” Although Muller does not verbalize this as such, Musculus’ assessment is essentially “a kiss of death” for the Thomist content-scholasticism and “a kiss of life” for those who are unwaveringly committed to Scripture as the exclusive *principium cognoscendi*, despite their possible and occasional method-scholasticism. For a solid treatment of all this, see also, Beeke, RST, I, 790-802.

⁴⁵⁶ Since God is a spirit and does not have a material, physical body, I take it that the image of God consists of man’s spirituality, his non-materiality, his non-physicality and was breathed into him by God himself (Gen. 2:7). The component elements of this spirituality are man’s heart as the life-mission control center, its three internal functions of thinking, willing and feeling, its two dimensions, moral and social, and its creative imagination, all conducive and necessary to take dominion in word and deed. In all this man is “theo-morph,” the “spitting” image of God, with the explicit understanding that God’s transcendence rules out “univocity” and his immanence “equivocity.” The confession of the Chalcedon-like double negative “without univocity” and without “equivocity” honors the impenetrable secret of the exact relationship between the Divine and the human which is shrouded in darkness, and leaves the God-breathed inerrant Word of Scripture as the exclusive source of all necessary, sufficient, possible and admissible knowledge. This includes the knowledge and embrace of any, and all complementary truths by the regenerate heart that are and must be baffling to the human mind. This, in turn, does, must, and should fuel worship and obedience as the only promising activities. All other ones will self-destruct. God’s wisdom in all this is unsearchable as well as ironic and grim. But it is eminently knowable. It is all predicated upon that first warning issued to Adam in Paradise. If you eat of that Tree in the middle of the garden to determine your own knowledge and your own conduct in a would-be “god-like” fashion, you *will* die. Centuries of history demonstrated the truth of this warning. The sting of death is every-where and its stench invariably shows up, sooner or later. So why don’t we at least wake up to this lesson of history? Also, in the area of theo-ontology refuse to move beyond Scripture in an illegitimate and sinful use of the good rule of “legitimate logical consequences” on the creaturely level? Let me reiterate it once more. Method-Scholasticism may be harmless, if not productive, wherever it is applied. But even if it at times hit the theological nail on the Biblical head, by and large the Medieval Content-Scholasticism as an institution was death in the pot. It cried out for the Reformation and its five *solas*. So, the Reformation and its theologians better shy away from this deadly virus (like the plague).

language and all the realities referred in and by them, as essentially undefinable.⁴⁵⁷ Again, contrast has the final say!

Both “triads,” in Martin’s words, go forever “around the mulberry bush,” cast a dark shadow upon the perspicuity of Scripture and ignore, overlook, or possibly reject its testimony, whether implicitly or explicitly.

To return to the Biblical sample of the relationship between Divine and human love and to press the issue at hand some more, what to make of the numerous Scriptures that speak about the love of God for his people, present even before the foundation of this world (Scriptures, such as, Deut. 4:37; 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 5:13; 20:21; Ezr. 3:11; Ps. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1-4; 136:1; Jer. 31:3; 33:11; Mal. 1:2; John 3:16; Rom. 5:5, 8; 8:39; Eph. 1:4-5, to name only a few). Should we take the route of the three-fold *via*, refuse to define it, simply tell our audience that this love is “inexpressible” and leave it at that? *Especially*, when faced with the words of Jesus who in his High-priestly Prayer petitions that “the *love* which the Father has loved him may be *in* (italics, mine) *his disciples*” (John 17:26)? Quite apparently, according to the clear Biblical wording (!), Jesus desires that the *very* love with which the Father loves the Son would *also* be present *in* his followers. And how about the testimony of Paul that the *love* of God is poured *in our* hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5)? Should we introduce the “univocal-equivocal-analogical” threesome and inform the audience that “the Divine love” of the Father would turn into a mere “*analogical* love” when it arrives in the disciples (Jesus) and is poured in their hearts (Paul), only to stop there? Frankly, it seems that even the “contrastive” scholastic Immutabilist must scratch his head when he reads the prayer of Jesus and hears Paul at this point.

My interpretation counsel is quite child-like simple. To determine its meaning, avoid the theo-ontological use of both “threesomes” (like the plague), and start with a definition and the nature of love *on the very level* on which God has revealed both in his Word. This echoes Musculus (1497-1563) who, as we saw, “delightfully” chides the “scholastics” for being “much more interested in searching into the hidden depths of the Trinity and discussing the love of God *ad intra* than in interpreting what Scripture had to say concerning God’s love.” In fact, when they in the end must declare that they cannot possibly say what that love is, he ups the ante and “chides” some more. “Let this be an incentive to pass over the scholastic inquiry and be guided by the simplicity of the Scriptures.”⁴⁵⁸ Given his death in 1563, a year

⁴⁵⁷ For further information about this “triad,” see, Robert Sweetman, “Univocity, Analogy and the Mystery of Being according to John Duns Scotus,” in James K. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 73-87; See also ; James K. A. Smith, *Introduction to Radical Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 155, 179; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112-132; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 197ff.

⁴⁵⁸ For this, see Muller, PRRD, III, 562-563. According to Muller, Musculus only “decries ‘scholastic’ excesses.” He is fully committed to and involved in “an exercise that lay at the heart of the scholastic effort—the examination of the text of Scripture with a view of the distinction of meanings in cases of seemingly equivocal usages of words.” I respectfully demur. To the extent that scholasticism is caught in the Aristotelian/Plotinian/Dionysian web that starts with the unknowability of God, and what this entails in terms of the three *viae* and the analogy concept, the excesses that Musculus decries come with the territory. They are inevitable and, as we saw, do not just show up in Medieval and post-Reformation content-scholasticism. They are alive and thriving until the very present wherever and whenever a beeline is taken to the three *viae* and to the analogy concept, so-called, to *establish* (*sic*) biblical truth. In one such instance all the perfections of God are said to be unknowable, and therefore ineffable, indefinable, and incommunicable. In short, when in scholasticism philosophical Thomism rules the roost, the “excesses” that need to be decried, with Musculus and Calvin, do and will extend themselves to all the perfections of God. None of them can

before Calvin died, he must have directed his “ire” against *Medieval* content-scholasticism. Belonging, at least by age, to the Mt. Rushmore of the Reformers, he must have understood the basic groundswell of its theo-ontology and qualified it as harmful, if not lethal. He raised a powerful voice against it that matched his equally powerful insight. We may be deeply grateful that we still may hear its “echo” today, even if this goes accompanied with a regret that many of his contemporaries, based upon his lament, apparently did not “get it.” At any rate, it was mostly drowned out by “lesser lights (?)” after his lifetime.

Honoring Musculus’ simplicity, I personally am committed to two “triads” that are superior to the two “threesomes” mentioned above. The first “triad” covers the Biblical definition of love and the second one centers on the Biblical nature of love.⁴⁵⁹ The threefold definition of love, presented here, is customary among the Puritans, but not too well known today, and regrettably even sidestepped at times. Love is “(1) a ‘desire’ to be ‘one’ with an object, (2) a ‘delight’ when this ‘oneness’ is achieved, and (3) a ‘display’ (‘deluge’) of giving to attain and retain this ‘oneness.’”⁴⁶⁰ Pertaining to the second “triad,” there is not much dispute about the threefold nature of love. Taking God’s love as the paradigm, (1) it is unconditional, that is, despite the rebellious nature and the corruption of its recipients (Jer. 5:23; 11:15a; 14:7-9; Rom. 5:6). (2) It is counter-conditional, that is, opposing the sinfulness of its recipients (Hebr. 12:5-6). (3) It is reconditioning, that is, aiming to turn its recipients into mint condition (Hebr. 12:5-6; 1 John 3:1-10; 4:17). Both “triads” provide a depth perspective on the Biblical references to the love of God and the love of man that does and must elude the two above-mentioned “threesomes.”

Let us start out by applying the first “triad” to God’s internal love “in” himself and then both “triads” to God’s external love “toward” mankind.

The very essence of God is love (1 John 4:16)! The doctrine of the *perichoresis* or *empirichoresis*, the *circuminsessio*, the mutual indwelling, the mutual inexistence of the three

be defined any longer. When this is openly acknowledged and is followed by the claim that essential unknowability spurs adoration, I am fearful that we encounter a “darkened” mind. Of course, the worship of a known God who in his essence has or in his sovereignty keeps unknowable or unknown secrets is in a different ballpark altogether! It is of interest to know that the Reformed orthodox while falling in line with Aquinas’ Dionysian scholasticism in all this, still appear to break out of it at times. For this, see Muller, PRRD, III, 561-588, and their attempts to define, love, mercy, grace, as these concepts pertain to God as well as man. Of course, this includes inestimable stalwarts, such as Owen whose shoelaces most of us cannot even touch. For the latter, see Baines, CIG, 322, 330. This receives our attention later as well.

⁴⁵⁹ It has been properly observed that 1 Cor. 13 does not present us with a definition of love, nor focuses on the nature of love. It only portrays the kaleidoscope of its characteristics however awesome and glorious this kaleidoscope is and be.

⁴⁶⁰ See Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust), Vol. 22, s. v., love, for this threefold definition. It is biblically and therefore indisputably anchored in passages, such as Col. 3:14 where love is defined as “the perfect bond of unity,” or “the uniting bond of perfection.” (See for this also John 17:23. Muller, PRRD, III, 564-569, essentially spells this definition out as well. He also explains it at length and accentuates that it was “common place” to present love in that way). To enlarge on it some, God desired to be united with me before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), delighted in me with rejoicing when that union took place (Zeph. 3:17), and copiously gave his Son for that union to become a reality (John 3:16) and his Holy Spirit for it to be permanent (Eph. 1:13-14). Now, will we allow the three *viae* and analogical reasoning to empty this from all certain and intelligible meaning? Or shall we use all this as a definite and comprehensible model to love God (in the totality of our existence) and to love the neighbor (in our evangelistic and sanctifying outreach)? The answer is a hearty “no” to the former and an even heartier “yes” to the latter.

Persons in the one God unmistakably spells out their essential desire for, their essential delight in, and their essential “self-surrender” to each other.⁴⁶¹

Then, God’s love for mankind, first “triad.” In his love he desired to be united with them even before creation (Eph. 1:4-5). In his love he took delight when this union took place (Zeph. 3:17). And in his love, he gave his Son to attain this union (John 3:16) and his Spirit to retain this union (Acts 2:38; Rom. 15:30). It is customary to “intone” that God’s love, once given, always remains the same. It does not increase, and it does not decrease. It does not go up and it does not go down.⁴⁶² This “intonement” puts too much Scripture in a dense fog. Why would God show his people that he is “a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24; Hebr. 12:29; see also Hebr. 10:31)? Why would God want to execute Moses (Ex. 4:24)? Why does he refuse to listen to the prayers for his people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11), in fact, why is he at times even angry with their prayers (Ps. 80:4)? To top this off, why does God at least in one instance come to hate (!) his beloved (!) people (Jer. 12:7-8) and pours his utterly devastating wrath upon them (Deut. 28:15-68)?

Well, here the second “triad” comes to the rescue. God’s love is uncompromisingly unconditional. His “desire to be one” with his people is and remains the same (Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:8), despite their unbelievable wickedness that undermines his “love of delight” and at overturns it at times to end up in hate. But it is also unarguably anti-conditional, that is, on incessant display in his words of judgment and his deeds of wrath. Finally, it is incontestably reconditioning in the “deluge” of his giving, first in the ministry of his Son, then in the ministry of his Spirit, and also in the ministry of his Church, all designed to produce a “delightful” people. Those who are definitively “delightful” in Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6) and progressively “delightful” on earth (Hebr. 12:14)! In a word, God’s electing “love of desire” is and remains the same. But his governmental “love of delight” has its “changes,” if not its “ups and downs” from a creaturely point of view. All this may be *too* difficult, impossible (?), to explain. But it is on open display in the Psalms (such as, Ps. 39:7-13), in the major as well as minor prophets. So, let us deal with it *on the level on which and for the purpose for which it is divulged* (Deut. 29:29b), without trying to figure out how this is or could be consonant with God in his atemporal eternity!

For a minor prophet, Malachi testifies to all this, both in the first part (Mal. 1:1-2:16) and in the second part (Mal. 2:17-4:6) of his book! Part: “I have loved you,” God states. “My ‘love of desire’ is incontestable (Yes, Yes!).” “We challenge that,” Israel retorts (Poo-Poo!). “Look at our deplorable situation!” “Compare yourself with Esau,” God responds (Hello, Hello?). “There you see what hate is!” “But let me turn the tables,” God continues (Woe-Woe!). “I have no pleasure (delight) in you.” “How about your giving me your leftovers, your stolen, and your damaged goods?” “How about my priests who no longer teach my Law?” “How about my people’s idolatry and staggering divorce rate?” “My ‘love of delight’ in you is gone (Mal. 1:10).” “Hence the devastation.” “But (Wait-Wait!) there will be a worldwide delightful people (Mal. 1:11).” “In addition (Remember-Remember!), my unconditional love

⁴⁶¹ This is essentially echoed by Ury, TP, 126, 128-129, 131-132, “*perichoresis* or *emperichoresis*,” that “grew out of prosopological—that is, ‘person’--exegesis” and was fed by the ‘in’ references in John 10:38, 14:10, 11, 20 and 17:21,” spells “God as ‘eternal, mutual, reciprocal, intercommunicative, interpenetrative, ecstatic, out of-one’s-self, self-giving love.” Because God *is* love, “there is no division at the fundamental level between the acts and the being of the Triune God.” The (three) *hupostaseis* (the three persons in the one Godhead) are dynamically related in that each possess the same enhypostatic (love) *energeia* in their own incommunicable personhood as Unregenerate, Generate and Procession.”

⁴⁶² See for the frequency and widespread use of this “intonement,” Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 174.

of desire to be united with you is as strong as ever!” Also look at Part Two (!): “You have wearied me,” God starts out. “How so?” Israel responds. “You challenge my justice in that I supposedly mix my categories of good and evil!” Well, let me tell you that in my immutable, unconditional, and reconditioning love I will send you my messenger as the Personified New Covenant. He will make you delightful but destroy who refuses to qualify as such. And, frankly, you don’t qualify. So repent! You want to know why? For two reasons! For one, you robbed me by not paying my tithes as the rental to put you up in the facilities with which I graced you. If you repent, you will be delightful again and experience this in bounties beyond your imagination. For another, you are arrogant by insisting that I mix my categories of good and evil and let people get away with murder. Those who fear me know better and testify to this. I will always remember them. They are my precious ones, and they will follow in my footsteps to assess the wicked and the righteous. So, what does the future hold? The day will come, a day of judgment for the wicked and exaltation for the righteous. In the meantime, keep the Law of Moses and seek to be “delightful.” Someone will come to assist you, the first evangelist, the first pastor-teacher and the first family counselor, John the Baptist (Mal. 4:5-6; Lk. 1:76-79)!” The complementarity of truth in the intertwinement of God’s Love of Desire and his Love of Delight can hardly be missed.

The same applies to the major prophets. When the Love of Delight comes to a “breaking point” (Jer. 12:8) and the just wrath of God is literally poured out upon Israel both as a requirement of his Holiness (Rev. 16:5) and as a display of his immutable Covenant dealing (Deut. 28:15), his Love of Desire “breaks right through” again (Ps. 30:5; Hos. 11:8; Joel 2:13) and God’s unconditional, counter-conditional and reconditioning love takes over once more in full force. At that time God can call himself “slow to anger” (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nah. 1:3) and the display of his anger temporary (Jer. 3:12), with an end in sight (Jer. 23:20; Ezek. 16:42) and of short duration (Ps. 30:5). This pattern is repeated many times.⁴⁶³

This is a remarkable, if not awesome pattern! I am afraid that those who are caught in the basically apostate philosophical net of both the threefold *via* and *analogical* reasoning can only subscribe to all this, if they are “a house divided” in their Kingdom service. Let me hasten to add at this point already that this analysis simply reflects what can be observed from Scripture. So, it is presented in a child-like “observation” language, without any expressed theo-ontological reservations, corrections, additions, or subtractions. This is how “God accommodates his communications to the capacity of his intended audience (i.e., human beings).”⁴⁶⁴ So, we simply take it at face value and respond in kind, on the level of God’s inerrantly revealed condescending accommodation. If God chooses to communicate with mankind on a certain level and in a certain way, why should anyone seek to transcend, and essentially to “correct” this, whether subtly or not so subtle, straightforward or by way of

⁴⁶³ For two samples, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel intersperse “break-through” chapters, where God’s “Love to be One” surfaces again, with the “breaking-point” ones where God’s anger is on fierce display. It is really astounding how closely related the all-consuming anger and the all-restoring love are in God. See the following compilation that displays the close proximity of the “breaking point” chapters and the “break-through” (italicized) ones. For Jeremiah: 1:1-22:30 – 23:1-6 – 23:7-24:4 – 24:6-7 – 24:8-28:17 – 29:1-14 – 29:15-32 – 30:1-33:26 – 34:1-52:30 – 52:31-33. For Ezekiel: 2:1-11:13 -- 11:14-25 -- 12:1-28:24 -- 28:24-26 -- 29:1-36:5 -- 36:6-28 -- 37:1-39:24 -- 39:25-48:35. This pattern is repeated time and again in the Minor Prophets. The analogy of a beam of white light that contains all the colors of the rainbow, simplicity-with-distinction, may be the best way to present the truth of this twofold reality as graphically as possible.

⁴⁶⁴ So, Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 480.

afterthought? If this means that we presently see all this “in a mirror dimly,” and only “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:12), *let it be*, until God does (would?) grant us, as much as this is creaturely possible, a 20-20 vision and a plenary knowledge (1 Cor. 13:12). In the meantime, God graces us with a focus on faith, hope, and *love* (1 Cor. 13:13) with all that this entails as “the only mandated thing needful.”

This sets the stage to apply the first “triad” to the love of people as it relates to God and both “triads” as it relates to their love for others.

To start with, let them exalt the wonder of, and be ever grateful for God’s love according to both “triads,” and then let them mirror, in fact, experience and return God’s love in them (Rom. 5:6) to him (Mt. 22:37-38) according to the first “triad,” let them seek to *commune* with him with your heart, mind, will and emotions, delight in this fellowship and aim to be “delightful” to him in heartfelt obedience, which is also the grand purpose of God’s second “triad,” and be unreservedly content *to leave it at that!*

Further, let God’s love in them be extended according to both “triads” in their relationship to others. Regarding unbelievers, since they can never be “one” with them without Jesus, let them make “sharing the Gospel” their top priority, not “whatever the cost,” but rather “with necessary cost and all!” Regarding believers, since they can never be “one” with them without God, let them make “sharing the Word,” once again top priority, with cost and all!

Why the earlier exhortation “to leave it at that?” Here is the response. Just as God is transcendent, his perfections are transcendent as well. This includes his love. Therefore, by all means do adorn your contentment by *adding* in emphatic worship that just as God’s being is unfathomable, so is his love in all its glory and riches. But “how” exactly the mystery of this transcendence plays out immanently in our hearts, we simply do not know! Here we once again come face to face with one of God’s secrets. So, here it is, “*Leave it alone! Leave it alone!*” Don’t pry! Be child-like! Commune with God *on the same level* as he communes with you, that is, in the language of Scripture and with the concepts of Scripture! Let this be enough, leave the rest to God. Don’t even ask how the always accommodating language stacks up to his transcendence. This is to “pry” into the secrets of God. Don’t sin and don’t waste your time and energy. There goes all the Platonian/Aristotelian/Plotinian/Dionysian infested philosophical scholasticism of Aquinas, his Fellow-Medievals, and his post-Reformation followers from the 16th century onward, that takes its apostate point of departure in an “unknowable ‘god,’” and uses the three *viae* and the analogy concept to undo the damage, instead of being content with a God-breathed Scripture as the sole *principium cognoscendi*, always taking him at his accommodating Word, and willing to operate within the parameters of its accommodating language. This comes down to a simple “*Just do what God tells you to do!*” This, of course, is both the very and the whole message of Deuteronomy 29:29. “Stay out and stay in!” “Out of my ‘secrets’ and in my love (Jude 21), lest I ‘lose’ my delight and pour out my wrath!”

Whether incidentally or not so incidentally, this will definitely allow us to identify “anthropomorphisms” whenever God discloses himself as having bodily parts, such as, hands, arms, feet, and even bowels (Jer. 31:20) or presents himself as operating in bodily space-time settings, such as God’s counsel-meetings (1 Ki. 22:19ff.) and God’s heavenly throne scenarios (Rev. 4:1ff). Since we are told that God does not have a body, to conclude to anthropomorphisms in these kinds of contexts with a perfectly transparent metaphorical meaning is an immediate “no-brainer” of obedient hermeneutics! However, to speak of

anthropomorphisms in the spiritual arena should be avoided. Since we are told that God is a spirit, and man is *theomorph* in his spirituality (more about this below), there are original, prototypal, divine realities of the spiritual sort that are reflected, if not copied on a derivative and replicated creaturely level in humans as God's spiritual mirror image.

In concrete terms, the biblical reference to God's heart as his life-mission control center is an anthropomorphism. God does not have a body. So, he does not have a literal, physical heart. Nor any other "bodily" members, for that matter. The same applies to references to God acting or speaking in cosmic space (Ps. 139:7-10) or time (Ps. 90:2). Since God is neither spatial nor temporal, these could be called "cosmo-morph."

But the references to God's spiritual, immaterial realities, such as his thinking, willing, feeling, speaking, acting, holiness, justice, love, mercy, long suffering, etc., etc., are not anthropomorph. From the perspective of God's transcendence, they may be accommodating terms (*accommodatio Dei*). But they are not anthropomorphisms. This would countermand the "kinship" reality as well as terminology that is applied to humankind as spirit, but not as body. Therefore, hermeneutical honesty, if not obedience vis-à-vis a "perfect" Word, breathed out by God himself through the agency of the Holy Spirit, takes, interprets, understands, interacts with, and responds to this terminology, and to the truths verbalized in it at face-value *on the very accommodated level* on which they are disclosed. Even the implicit suggestion, let alone the explicit one, that we really must move beyond it if we wish to "grasp" reality, is basically "arrogant," whether intentionally or not. It infers that Scripture could stand "correction," all possible protestations to the contrary. Scripture is the sole *instrumentum cognoscendi*, delineates mankind's realm of operations, including lingual ones, commands it to stay within its creaturely bounds, and exclusively to concentrate on its covenantal obligations.

To make this intelligibly transparent in its concrete dimension, also, if not specifically for the present Church requires a proper vision of the longitudinal nature of God's covenantal dealings with mankind as a steadily rising Covenantal Edifice of Life, which shows the start of life, determines the nature of life, governs the progress of life and ends with a display of life. All its stories are clearly designed by God to start at the beginning and to arrive at the end according to his sovereign plan in his sovereign way. The first, Paradisial, story of this Covenantal Edifice stipulated that the life of mankind consisted of obedience by taking dominion of created reality (and multiplying in the process) *by, under, and for* God. Upon its Satan-instigated rebellion the second, Post-Fall, story saw the continuation of the dominion mandate, which was bound to be a failing proposition under the New Management of a Liar/Murderer, but also identified "light at the end of the tunnel" by means of a Lord and Savior who would crushingly dethrone and victoriously replace the Liar/Murderer. The third, Noahic, story saw God's judgment in the destruction of all the products of mankind's dominion-taking as well as their producers, except one family, but also settled once and for all that this dominion-taking would continue, and not be terminated in the same destructive way again, although mankind's wickedness would continue to deserve this. So, Noah, his family, and their offspring simply continued where they had left off and not surprisingly ended up with the Tower of Babel. The outcome? Dispersion rather than destruction! The fourth, Mosaic, story revealed that dominion taking would only be successful, if it would take place in the fear of God and according to the law of God (see for this also Eccl. 13:13). Both "Noah" and "Moses" tells us "doomed if you don't take dominion" (death by starvation), but also "doomed, if you do" ("Tower of Babel" and "The Exile"). The continuation of human

wickedness is exhibited in “Noah” as “a display of death.” The inevitability of human wickedness is exposed in “Moses” as “a ministry of death.” Together they spawn the fifth and the sixth story. The fifth, Davidic, story identifies the Great Conqueror of the Liar/Murderer to come out of the house of David. The sixth, the New Covenant or Penthouse, story is the culmination point that guarantees the arrival of the End of the present age, an innumerable multitude as the showcase of his Trinitarian Glory and the Sum-total of his perfections. It is in this context that Almighty God appoints his Church to flex its Holy Spirit muscle as an Ambassador of its Commander-in-Chief. Christ as the Lion-Lamb, the King Priest turns the nations into the breeding ground of “the innumerable multitude” through his Cross and his Resurrection. The Church, consisting of king-priests, lion-lambs, must embrace them as its “fishing ground.” “Stay in your realm! Don’t even focus on my “secrets.” Do your Job! While taking dominion and multiplying together with all mankind as an ever-ongoing mandate as well as inevitability, “Turn the nations into disciples by means of my threefold Gospel, baptize them in the name of the Triune God, and teach them to observe whatever I command!” This bankrupt world has no independent purpose. Neither has the Church, other than to obey its Commander-in-Chief to the letter! Scanning the history and rise of God’s multi-stored Covenant of Life, the Church will regard it as its greatest privilege to exhaust itself in its labor toward the Grand Demonstration of the Trinitarian Glory of God in the Sum-total of his perfections.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Those who realize all this cannot but be dismayed by the theory, such as advanced by the recent “two-kingdom theology, that ever since Noah there are two realms. First, a shared common grace realm in which Christians and non-Christians stand shoulder to shoulder and act hand in hand in establishing a functioning civil society by means of a universally agreed upon natural law. Second, a distinct realm in which Christians through special grace are governed by biblical law unto redemptive righteousness. Clearly, no making of disciples in the shared realm. Not even a need for it. One “two-kingdom” theologian even seems to hold that his theory simply put in concrete what already is experienced as a general “state of affairs,” namely evangelistic silence in the public square. To be silent is one thing. But to theoretically justify it is quite another. This theory seeks to throw a monkey wrench in God’s mandated procedures to get to the display of his glory. This is unconscionable, must be resisted to the hilt, and should stand condemned. The following two samples may shed some light how to bring the Word and the Gospel to bear in the Public Square. Say, in a local Town Council meeting, where Muslims, Marxists, Christians, etc., etc., have all an equal say, one of the members proposes the installation of a streetlight in a dark environment for the safety of women and children. Everyone chimes in on it in a lively discussion. When it is the Christian’s turn, he says the following. “You remember my opening statement upon my election to this Council, which I have repeated in private discussions as well, to make sure that you knew where I am coming from. ‘I am committed full tilt to work for the wellbeing of our community. Every ‘good’ that we accomplish serves our people and is a common grace from above. Since every common grace is an eloquent but silent summons to repentance, I vote in favor of a streetlight for the safety of all citizens in this temporal world *and* as an additional summons to repent as the only way to secure eternal life.’” When repeated frequently enough in enough places and in enough circumstances, Main Street will increasingly be salted and light up. The responses may vary, challenge, protest, hostility, agreement, inquiry? But God’s boundless Lordship is on the table. It covers every square inch of this creation, also the Public Square! Further, when I was an active member of a political Think Tank in Uganda, I proposed a course of action based upon my expressed belief-system. Both a Marxist and a Muslim promptly protested. “You may not introduce your belief-system in this forum. Talk ‘action,’ even ‘ethics,’ but not ‘faith.’” I smiled and retorted that I wanted all participants to explain their actions and ethics out of their belief-system. “Put it on the carpet so that all of us show and know exactly where we are coming from and so learn to trust each other in the process rather than passing each other as ships in the night. This mutual trust is vital and necessary to make progress.” Then I added with a second smile, “Of course, it is possible that in the end, the Muslim will turn onto a Marxist, the Marxist into a Christian and the Christian into a Muslim.” At that time, everyone smiled, starting with the

Returning at this point once more to the biblical concept of love, the “ethical” bottom line (Deut. 29:29b) of all this in concrete language is the following. By all means do desire to be united to and to commune with your God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Take delight when this union and communion occurs. Then display all this in a life of total surrender, obedience and service that arises from, shows an abiding in, and aims at a solidifying of this union and communion. Furthermore, extend this same love to your fellowmen. As you instinctively relate to yourself, desire their union and communion, delight in arriving at it, and display this in a deluge of service. When your fellowmen are unbelievers, as an evidence of your love, “Evangelize (with all that this entails) or Fossilize!” When they become Baptized believers, as a further evidence of your love, “Sanctify them (with all this entails) or Petrify!”

Frankly, Augustine already blazed the trail for the first “triad.” He tells us in a concrete and “down-to-earth” way, “A love that strains after the possession of the loved object is *desire* (with reference to Ps. 119:20; Phil. 1:23), and the love that possesses and enjoys that object is *joy* (or delight) (with reference to Ps. 4:7; 16:11; 32:11).”⁴⁶⁶ The third component of the first “triad” is not mentioned in this context. But it is on unmistakable display in “the book of his life.” This includes his voluminous writings and his manifold actions, which give ample evidence of his “love of display” in the “delightful” deluge of sacrificial service, not in the last place in his evangelistic and sanctifying labors.

All this should be the perennial paradigmatic response whenever we come face to face with complementary truths. Do not try to plumb its essence. Leave it alone. Keep a safe distance. Incessantly pursue its explicitly mandated ethics. Display the obedience of faith! Of course, it takes a regenerate heart to seek and express such response and a purified heart to embrace and embody it. This, frankly, underscores the perennial need both to make disciples so as to arrive at a once and for all heart transplant in order to be child-like and then to mentor and equip them so as to undergo an ever-continuing heart and life purification in order to act in a child-like manner!

One more step is necessary, however. Both Classic Immutabilists and recent Mutabilists may detect “mutability” in God’s love of delight, Immutabilists to their “dismay” and Mutabilists to their “delight (?)” My response to both is the same. The Immutable God has not only laid down basic covenantal ground rules in Scripture, such as in Jeremiah 18:5-10, but also put them on display in his words and actions, such as exemplified in Exodus 32:9-14, 2 Kings 20:1-6, Jonah 3:10, with regards both to the integrity of his revealed Word and to his inter-speaking and inter-acting with creature man. First, his revealed Word stands like a rock! It is immutable (Numb. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29) as it is sworn by himself and by his holiness (Hebr. 6:13, 17-18). Second, his inter-speaking and inter-acting also show an immutable pattern. As the God of the Covenant he enters a bond-relationship which is invariably one of holiness. In this bond-relationship he holds out the prospect of a twofold relenting. A relenting unto good and a relenting unto evil (Jer. 18:7-10). A threat of destruction upon wickedness can and will turn into a blessing upon repentance and consequent obedience. A promise of prosperity can and will turn in to a curse upon rebellion

Moderator, who later expressed his initial uneasiness when the protests were voiced. It could have been the end of a productive meeting. Bottom-line: The Word of God was in the open in Main Street, which spawned intriguing post-Think Tank meeting interactions. All in all, when God tells us that there is not one “square inch” that should not revel in his Kingship, it is dutiful to notify *every* “square inch” of this, and quite the opposite to treat “square miles” as if they can do quite well on their own!

⁴⁶⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 8.

and consequent corruption. Manasseh found out the truth of the former when he experienced God's favor upon his repentance with its subsequent fruits (2 Chron. 33:10-13, 15-16, 18-19). Saul found out the latter when his insubordination resulted in God's impeachment of him (1 Sam. 15:22-23) and his refusal even to listen to him any longer (1 Sam. 28:6).⁴⁶⁷ God's two-track, dual dimensional "change of pace" in his approving or disapproving response and the consequent corresponding action of blessing or curse (Deut. 28:1ff) is immutably predictable.⁴⁶⁸ After all, it is rightly called a "Constitutional Component of the Covenant," issued by our Covenant God and to his Covenant People. God is an immutable Constitutional Monarch! So far, so good. But there is more.

God's "mindset" in his response is recorded either in terms of "displeasure" (Hebr. 10:38), "regret" (Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:10, 35), "grief" (Gen. 6:6) and "anger" (Deut. 9:19; Ps. 2:5; 6:1; 38:1; 85:3-5) or in terms of his "amen" (Mal. 3:17), his "pleasure" (Ps. 147:11; Col. 3:20; 1 John 3:22) and his "delight" (Zeph. 3:17).

So, what to make of all this? For an important starter, it shows that our God is personally involved and is not in the same ballpark as the ever-detached, abstract, immobile, barren,

⁴⁶⁷ Many, if not most commentators read a contradiction in 1 Sam. 15. This emphatically not the case, based upon a superficial reading, if not misreading of the chapter. On the one hand 15:10 and 35 appear to imply a change of mind. On the other hand, 15:29 is said to declare the very opposite. This assessment, however, cannot be substantiated. 1 Sam. 15:29 is emphatic in conveying that God stands by his *Word*. In this he does not change, and never will (Is. 40:8). But this is bracketed by a two-fold avowal that his "attitude," inclusive of his "mind," (as well as of his "will" and "feelings (?)," toward *Saul* did change, with all that this entails in terms of judgment. Bottom line, we should not play out apples against oranges. God does not change his mind about his *Word*. This stands like a rock. Num. 23:19 underscores this. But on the accommodating level he tells us that he does change his attitude, plus his corresponding actions, regarding *people*. At times he "repents" unto "evil," as in *Saul's* case, and at times unto "good," such as in Ex. 32:7-14. In fact, it is his *immutable Word* that predicates when and how God's Covenant people on the accommodated level can expect a change of his attitude, inclusive of his mind and actions (Jer. 18:7-10). Once again, rather than "breaking" our brain upon how this comports with God's transcendence, we respond in a child-like fashion on the very level on which we are addressed! Frankly, I am sympathetic to the way that Reformed orthodoxy, according to Beeke-Smalley, RST, I, 702-716, settles the issue. It insists on a balance of two equally unassailable truths. Within the framework of his immutable plan and will, God changes his personal relationships and his outward actions, precisely as he laid out that he predictably would. This honors if not harmonizes both his indisputable and inviolable sovereignty and the unimpeded and consequential responsibility of man. All this is clearly prompted by the laudable conviction that the Transcendence of God never can and never may be downgraded, let alone be curtailed and that his personal Immanence is unquestionable and obvious in that it follows a disclosed pattern. The language used to bring especially God's immanence to expression, such as "vexation," "grief," and "repentance," may be explained as indicating "accommodation." But it is not necessary, or even advisable, for Beeke-Smalley to call it "anthropomorphic," let alone "analogical." This terminology tends to undercut the *gravitas* of God's intended message. It would have been preferable if they had simply and in as many words taken child-like refuge in the incomprehensible complementarity of truth and issued a Gospel challenge to all "nay-sayers" to follow suit, similar to the one Paul issued to Herod Agrippa in Acts 26:27-29. In a word, get the *gravitas*-message contained in the verbiage of Scripture, and leave it at that. When commenting on verses, such as Gen. 6:6-7, which refers to God's "grief" and "regret," John Calvin as "a child of his time" does introduce interpretative terms such as "anthropomorphism." But, as I argue further below, more as a postscript, after the gravity of the text has been emphasized. In this he transcended his time. Of course, it would have been preferable if he had foregone the postscript!

⁴⁶⁸ Kamphuis, 44, observes that the Reformers never taught "that the doctrine of Divine immutability implied that God could not 'change course' or could not change his attitude toward creature man." But "they did confess that he in and through all the changes in his work in this world remained immutably 'The Same' and carried out his immutable Counsel." That in Scripture God's immutable plan and his mutable action and attitude dovetail is incontestable. But how they dovetail is just as incontestably incomprehensible. Here one is taxed to be "child-like," which can never materialize without a regenerate heart that in principle has once and for all surrendered its ultimacy, but at times wrestles with it in practice.

never communicating, or even able to communicate and therefore detestable “godhead-its” of apostate philosophers.⁴⁶⁹ They are “worthless” products (Acts 14:15) of “willful suppression” (Rom. 1:18), constitute “empty fraudulence” (Col. 2:8), exemplify times of “self-inflicted ignorance” (Acts 14:16; 17:30a), which calls for repentance (Acts 17:30b), and therefore cannot and may not be compared to, let alone be equated with the God of Scripture in any way, shape or form (Acts 14:15). Further, those who are committed to a basically Thomist simplicity doctrine which includes his view of immutability and impassibility will categorically deny that it is appropriate to ascribe “displeasure,” “regret,” “sorrow,” “indignation,” or “anger” to God.⁴⁷⁰ In fact, they often question whether God has any affections (emotions) in the first place.⁴⁷¹ At any rate, this Thomism has been so influential not only in Classic Reformed scholasticism, but also in the Reformers that it led them to conclude that these terms are “anthropopathisms.” Therefore, they better be taken with more than a grain of salt, when applied to God.

This has spawned a backlash. What anthropopathisms? Take God at his Word and quickly show any, and all Hellenistic infested interpretations the door. At times this led to the denial of all anthropomorphisms. After all, so the reasoning went, since man is theomorph, created in God’s image, that is body and soul, maybe God even has hands, feet, etc., etc. (even “bowels,” *splachna*, Lk. 1:78?), be it on the divine level. Of course, and once more, the latter is unsustainable. God does not have a body. So, all the numerous references to God’s body parts, such as, his arm, his hands, etc. (Ps. 10:12; 119:73; Is. 51:9; 63:15), his bodily activities, such as, his waking up from sleep (Ps. 35:23; 78:65), and his bodily “settings,” such as, his assemblies or advisory meetings (Ps. 89:5; 1 Ki. 22:19ff; Rom. 11:34) are clearly metaphors with a clear-cut anthropo-morphic or cosmo-morphic dimension. Just as with all other figures of speech, graphic images, representative concepts, and emblematic language in general, it is immediately clear what they stand for.

⁴⁶⁹ “Detestable,” if God’s incessant assessment of idols in the OT is any indication!

⁴⁷⁰ See for this, as well as for its (partial) analysis, Wolterstorff, IG, 227-229. In terms of “sorrow,” he denies, *versus* Aquinas, that it is an imperfection. In the presence of evil sorrow (as well as displeasure, regret, indignation, anger) is an *excellence*, rather than a *deficiency*! Aquinas’ retort? Why would God sorrow over an evil if it serves a greater good? A stag may experience sorrow under the onslaught of a lion. But it is food for the lion, “a greater good!” Transferring this to the area of “morality,” even if something must be earmarked as evil according to and opposed to God’s antecedent will, such as the sin of murder, why would he look back at it once his consequent will has handled the aftermath? Done is done! Wolterstorff’s subsequent but apparently unanswered question. Since sin remains an evil, whether according to and opposed to his antecedent *or* to his consequent will, why would God not sorrow over sin for what it was, is, and always remains?

⁴⁷¹ For this, see Mastricht, II, 304, 317-318; as well as the lengthy treatment in Muller, PRRD, III, 551-589, esp. 552-553, 558-560. According to the Reformed orthodox the attribution of affections to God must, by definition, be “metaphorical” for four reasons. First, they “always have an *incomplete, imperfect act of the will* or volition joined to them,” due to the gap between “purpose and execution” and by “acquired attractions or repulsions.” Second, they depend on external objects. Third, they are “accompanied by change and mutability.” Fourth, many affections “denote impotence” in God “by indicating desire for impossibilities or even disappointments.” All this runs counter to the all-sufficiency or perfect blessedness of God. However, some affections, such as love, mercy, etc., are “truly and properly” predicated of God, of course, minus any, and all possible “imperfections,” while others, such as regret, anger, etc., “improperly or figuratively” so! As such these are designated as anthropopathisms. But more about this below.

But how about God's affections (emotions)? Even those committed to Immutability are not unanimous on this topic.⁴⁷² This is for a specific reason!⁴⁷³ Emotions are usually up and down affairs. So, how can they apply to God? However, "love" is an emotion as well, and this is predicated of God in no uncertain terms. He is both "love" and "loving." So, how do we assess all this? Well, once again, but now in greater detail, it is undeniable that man is theomorph. That is, he images (*morph*) God (*theos*). However, to get a proper handle on this, it is mandatory to be biblically precise in defining what the "image of God" stands for. Since God does not have a body, the notion that the human body is a constituent component of the image of God is unacceptable. So, if "the image" of God covers his spirituality, that is, his ontological immateriality, as argued extensively above, it includes his heart with its three internal functions of thinking, willing and feeling, to restrict ourselves just to these immaterial "components in the present setting. Incidentally, we should be nonplussed to hold that God "theomorphs" us in our thinking and willing but adds (read: saddles us with) a further component, that of emotion, which would be foreign to himself. On top of this, he would portray himself in the Biblical record as a God with emotions that he really does not possess! This makes little sense. So, we better confess that he is an immutably thinking, willing and emotional God. Of course, incomprehensibly so, without any of time processes (mind), the deliberations (will) or the agitations and perturbations (emotions) that are peculiarly human! We cannot possibly describe the essence of any component of his a-temporal essence/existence, whether his a-temporal thinking, his a-temporal willing or his a-temporal feeling. So, from this vantage point, all three components of this "triad" find themselves on a level "playing field." Their essence is a Divine mystery and therefore a "secret" which we never can (1 Tim. 6:16) or may (Deut. 29:29a) approach at any time and under any circumstances! At any rate, while we must fill all three with biblical content, to deny the existence of anyone of them in God, such as Divine affections, is inappropriate.

For a starter, all this prompts the fundamental conclusion that a sharp distinction must be made between the Bible ascribing "bodily" and "cosmic" references to God, on the one hand, and the Scripture mentioning spiritual, non-material realities, on the other. Since God does not have a body, "bodily" references of whatever kind are always "anthropo-morph" or "cosmo-morph." But there is a "spiritual" kinship that comes to expression in the image of God. This means that the mention of "spiritual" realities does and must transcend the purely anthropomorph, cosmo-morph, and anthropopathic level. This is customarily recognized when it pertains to the so-called "good" spiritualities, such as God's love. These are properly attributed to God, even if by some they are (to be) boosted above, if not beyond the human level, that is, put in the stratosphere and so etherealized (?) by means of the three *viae* or the equivocity-analogy-univocity triad. The "bad" spiritualities, however, are a different breed. They cannot and may not be ascribed to God, such as, "grief," "anger," "regret." They receive the label of anthropomorphic or anthropopathic. This does (may?) tend to undercut and put their message in jeopardy if not virtually dismiss it. So, the "good" category tends to be "etherealized" and the bad one "entombed." There simply must be a

⁴⁷² See Bavinck, II, 99-110; esp. 103-104, on kinship; Frame, ST, 412-415; Muller, PRRD, III, 33; Beeke, I, 829-875, is especially perceptive, balanced, helpful, and so warmly recommended reading. Some of his observations return below.

⁴⁷³ The main question is whether God can or cannot be "acted upon," let alone experience circumstances or conditions that would "disturb" him. The main reason for the denial of emotions/affections in God is the rejection of the notion that he can be "acted upon."

better way to deal with the message that the inerrant text of God's eternal Word seeks to convey!

Let us start with the so-called "bad" category, with concepts, such as "regret," "grief," "anger," etc. Well, like in all components of his Self-disclosure, God always "accommodates" or "adapts" himself in this terminology to our human level. Since he reveals himself on this level, we do understand him and must respond to him *on this same level and leave it at that*. This is to say, for a starter, that we better ban all theo-ontology, whether a sniffing, a probing, an explaining, or any other type, to make all this humanly intelligible to whatever degree. Concretely, we will not conclude that they are (must be) anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms that has no possible semblance to the Divine reality. This is essentially to come to God's defense over against his God-breathed and therefore perfect Word.⁴⁷⁴ Neither will we conclude that they are (must be) all too human "God-disturbing" regrets, griefs, or angers. All child-like Christians, including child-like theologians (Ps. 131-2-3), will shun the ever-threatening and destructive Scylla as well as the similarly problematic Charybdis outlined above.

But how, then, should we go about this? Well, when we hear "Scripture speak of the affliction of the Lord (Is. 63:9), of the vexation (Is. 63:10) and the grief of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30)," we will listen to the exhortation of the child-like theologian already quoted above. "Woe the man, who casually and arrogantly shrugs his shoulders when he hears these awesome words of Scripture and dismisses them out of hand, looking down at them from the "Mt. Everest" of his philosophical god-idea, and ambles routinely down his usual path with the glib explanation that this is an anthropomorphism." Of course, while listening to these appropriately loaded and properly incisive words, we will also refuse to mitigate them by turning the utterly Transcendent God into "one of us" in his emotional make-up, "perturbation" and all.⁴⁷⁵ So, what is the bottom line? While honoring the biblical parameters on the accommodated language level to the full, we will not seek to transcend it. This means negatively that we once and for all will refuse to call anything in Scripture an anthropopathism. This would imply that the language to which this designation is attached is basically imperfect, improper, and defective, if not *essentially* objectionable. This paved the way to the "disparaging" assessment of Scripture, of (some of) its language, and of (some of) its concepts that we encountered above. Purportedly a "good and necessary" consequence, not only does it have no "verifiable anchorage" in Scripture, none whatsoever, it goes against its very grain and therefore on the face of it already is an impermissible and therefore inadmissible polluted consequence. Whether consciously or not, such assessment must detract from Scripture as completely and unreservedly perfect, and, further, whether intentionally or not, must undermine the full impact of the message that Scripture seeks to convey. On the other hand, this means positively that we will "fear" God and, at any cost or price, will seek to avoid of ever becoming the objects of his "vexation," "regret," "grief," and

⁴⁷⁴ According to Muller, PRRD, II, 187-188, "Calvin assumes that Scripture expresses in a form accommodated to human understanding the 'eternal and inviolable' truth of God." However, "given in a form suited to our capacity, Scripture is hardly an imperfect witness." ... "The concept of accommodation is found quite consistently among the Reformed orthodox both in their understanding of theology and revelation and in their discussions of the perfection of Scripture as the finite perfection of an instrument suited toward a particular end." The clear implication is that no one should ever seek to "correct" Scripture as if it does not know what it is doing. A God "breathes" out his Word he does need "Listerine," a mouthwash, to make it smell good!

⁴⁷⁵ This is the upshot of Wolterstorff, IG, 223-238.

“anger” as we understand it on the human level without ever trying to determine how it all relates to the so-called *ad intra* essence of God.

What may be the way to achieve this? Well, by our incessant and intense pursuit of Divine “ethics!”⁴⁷⁶ this means, for a negative starter, not to “vex,” “grieve” or “anger” God as we understand this on the *creaturely* (human) level! For its positive complement this tells us to “please,” “delight,” “gratify” God by our unreserved obedience. Once again, “vexing,” etc., as well as “pleasing,” etc., God, are accommodating terms. Their essence as this applies to God is beyond us which must be acknowledged without further inquiry or comments. But their message is and remains utterly majestic and unmistakable. To turn them into grist for our theo-ontological mill is to disable (either etherealize or entomb) them in their impressive quality and intended impact. The apparently much overlooked or neglected Wolfgang Musculus in discussing “the anger of God” comes close to hitting the nail on the head. He argues that while “God is not moved or changed in the way a human being is moved and changed,” God still “may become angry” (“wow!”). “This,” in Muller’s commentary, “is not a subject that we ought to investigate with great curiosity in as much as it ‘surpasses our capacity.’”⁴⁷⁷ In other words, take all the so-called “good” or “bad” terms at face value in a child-like manner, let them speak for themselves, and as such *act* upon them. Beyond this, leave them alone! This is--foundational bottom line as well as all-overarching umbrella--to embrace, honor, and practice *the complementarity of truth*! Let us face it in all concrete honesty! Whenever we teach a passage in Scripture in which we come face to face with God’s anger, and there are plenty of passages of that sort, will we really tell our audience that God essentially never is and never can be angry, in fact, does not even know what anger is, and repeat all this with every term that is in the same ballpark? Of course not! We boldly, if not bluntly tell folks in no uncertain terms, “You know full well what anger stands for and what it entails, so ‘respond’ in kind for your life’s sake!” This settles it once and for all. No subtle or not so subtle, plain or not so plain (erudite), theo-ontological “question marks” allowed! Not ever! Keep your “pedantic” mind, your “pedantic” tongue, and your “pedantic” pen on a leash, and do not move beyond your pay scale and your jurisdiction! Let your regenerate heart always be child-like. In case of need, purify it!⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Regrettably, the same Kamphuis, *Katholieke Vastheid*, 87, whom we just quoted with such profound agreement does not emphasize, explain, and exhort with equal force the utter need to “embody” the Three-fold Marching Order of our Commander-in-Chief (Mt. 28:19-20). But this he has in common with most (all?) authors who seek to “plumb” this topic. Is it too much of a lament that the “teapot” reigns and rules whenever there is no “spill-over” in hands-on practical godliness?

⁴⁷⁷ Muller, PRRD, III, 582. See also the excellent coverage of God’s wrath in Beeke, RST, I, 852-861, esp. 859-861.

⁴⁷⁸ It is rather ironic that many commentators tell us that terms, such as Divine grief, regret, vexation, etc., “really” do not pertain to his emotions, but rather to his actions. Scripture, on the other hand, mentions these terms as indications of God’s displeasure with our disobedience and as spurs to our commensurate actions! Frankly, there is something topsy-turvy here! The focus of these terms is not on *God’s* actions, whatever they eventually may be and however they may turn out. It is *our* actions that are called in question, whether sins of commission or omission, and *our* actions that do or will have ultimate consequences, unless suspended by God’s grace, avoided by our obedience, remedied by our repentance, or all of the above! No suspension for a corrupt mankind or for a dreadful Saul. Remedy for a Moses through a last-minute obedience. Pure grace for a repentant David. Rather than theo-ontologically analyzing and assessing what is going on in God all of us better focus fully and prayerfully upon all courses of non-corrupt, obedient, and repentant action as they are mandated in God’s word. We will have our “time” and our “hands full!” Why falling for the dreadful temptation to have our “minds full” other than to determine how we must and can have our “time,” our “hands,” our “feet,” etc., etc., etc., “full” so as to be “delight-full” to him and enjoy the smile of his approval.

It also entails that terms like “mere metaphors” with regard either to so-called “good” or to so-called “bad” concepts are “out.”⁴⁷⁹ They would undercut both the message and the impact of the “God-breathed” text. The same applies to designating “bad” concepts as “anthropopathic.” This terminology suffers of the same malady. Whatever “honorable” intentions may prompt its usage, it essentially conveys that these concepts do not, in fact, cannot “really” mean what they say! This is an invite to take them with enough of a grain of salt that it reroutes our focus, more precisely, diverts us from the focus to which God’s Message obliges us. Scripture refers often-times terms, such as to the wrath of God. It is soul-endangering folly to tone down its impact in whatever way, shape or form. It is noteworthy that Musculus stayed away from the anthropopathic designation when he refers to the affections of God, not to interfere with their full impact upon a creaturely human level. From my perspective he has it over Calvin at this point. But to the latter’s credit even in him this designation seems more like an afterthought, always brought into the picture after the Message was driven home. For example, the full force of “the divine grief/regret” in Genesis 6:6-7 that was the precursor of the unleashing of an instrument of death and destruction that virtually wiped out all of mankind was not lost to Calvin.

For all practical purposes, therefore, the bottom line is simple as well as profound. Honor the complementarity of truth that cannot be explained by the human mind. This is to say, honor both God’s *revealed* Transcendence and his *revealed* Immanence. Concretely, avoid the Scylla of “etherealizing” terms, such as anger, wrath, grief, regret, etc., so that they lose their Immanence and their impact. Equally avoid the Charybdis of “domesticating” God, so that he loses his Transcendence and his glory!⁴⁸⁰ In short, let us not seek to figure out how they mesh or try to be wiser than him by reinterpreting either or both beyond the plain grammatico-historical meaning of the Biblical text and take it from there in hot pursuit of the mandated “ethics.”

If all this “grabs” us the way it should, we will look in horror with Paul at Ancient Western philosophy that suppresses the knowledge of God in ungodliness and unrighteousness and ends up with an apostate “god-idea,” such as “The Abstract Universal” or “The Unknowable Supreme.” Of course, this “god-idea” spells “transcendence” with a

⁴⁷⁹ Sarah Coakley, “‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity,” in Davis, TT, 138-139, argues admittedly “not uncontentiously,” that “neither ‘metaphorical’ nor ‘analogical’ language for God is incompatible with ‘literal’ claims.” “Literal” is not to be taken in the sense of “univocal with common usage,” but rather as characteristic of “statements in which ‘one is attributing to the subject the property with which the predicate is associated by its semantic status in the language.’” In other words, it cannot be assumed that with “metaphorical language no purchase of reality is attempted or achieved.” The denseness of the original statement and the tentativeness of the explanation betrays her dilemma. She wants to stay away from univocity without falling in the arms of equivocity! In other words, she “restlessly” wants to eat her cake and have it too, and thereby refuses to resort to the only way to give her cognitive tranquility, namely the admission and embrace of the incomprehensibility of complementarity of truth. But for that one needs to have a regenerate heart!

⁴⁸⁰ From this perspective it is perfectly appropriate to emphasize (1) that the use of terms, such as “grief” and “vexation” does not impinge upon God’s eternal, uninterrupted, and unintermittible joyful blessedness, and (2) that the use of concepts, such as “anger and wrath,” does not impinge upon his immutability. To honor the incomprehensible complementarity of truth is to ensure that the one pole does not swallow up the other. Once again, it is to be Chalcedonian, that is, to combat any, and all kinds “confusion” or “change” as well as any, and all sorts of “division” or “separation!” Once again, this is not “walking a tightrope” or “doing a balancing act.” It portrays the joyful harmony and worshipful peace of child-like regenerate hearts in a child-like Council! Incidentally it is not surprising that “Chalcedon” is “hated” by everyone who does not want to see his mind be and remain “leashed.” See for this also, Beeke, RST, I, 854-859.

vengeance. But it is as far removed from the biblical transcendence as hell is from heaven.⁴⁸¹ For this transcendence has no contact whatsoever with any “concrete particular” and cannot even reveal itself. What is in evidence here is not just a study in (benign) “contrast.” It is a deadly hostile state of affairs!⁴⁸² In fact, it may well epitomize a most dreadful component of the radical and total warfare sovereignly imposed upon the history of man by our God (Gen, 3:15) and waged with such a tenacious vengeance on the part of the False Prophet with his ideological schemes that manage to deceive millions to their eternal destruction (Rev. 13:11-17; 19:20). What a hellish difference, indeed, with the transcendence of the *Triune* God, the Uncreated One-and-Many, who is simultaneously and harmoniously immanent in his creation, characterized by ubiquitous created one-and-many spheres with all this entails, and graciously as well as effectively discloses himself as such in his Nature-manifestation as well as in his Word-revelation. We are told time and again that in every Western philosophical scheme, whether of the Ancient or the Modern variety the “godhead” is unknowable as the contentless product of human abstraction.⁴⁸³ So why would we opt for a method that seeks to set this in concrete ironically in order to argue for the knowable God of Scripture who is an “ocean of infinite fullness” in the Trinitarian sum-total of his glorious perfections and has graciously revealed himself as such?

Subsequently, we should look in consternation when Medieval and Reformation scholasticism up till the present time defends, applauds and adopts a philosophical Trojan Horse, which at bottom is viciously inimical to the living and life-giving Trinitarian God of Scripture, in order to establish Biblical truth. There is no doubt that both whole-heartedly embrace the Trinitarian God of Holy Writ in his Transcendence and his Immanence. So, it would be unseemly to cast aspersions upon their intentions. Nevertheless, they essentially incorporated a philosophically contrastive view of Transcendence and Immanence in their thinking and sought to solve their “secret” relationship in lockstep with it. With that they went (more than) a “bridge too far.”

⁴⁸¹ Frame, ST, 41, 45-46, 49-50, 701-702. This is also the conviction of Bavinck in a three-part analysis, RD, II, 176. The first part is right to the point, “The simplicity of God is absolutely not a metaphysical abstraction. It is essentially distinct from the philosophical idea of absolute Being, the One, the only One, the Absolute, or substance, terms by which ... Plato, Plotinus ... and later Hegel designated God. It is not found by abstraction, that is by eliminating all the contrast and distinctions that characterize creatures and describing him as the being who transcends all contrasts.” The second part runs as follows, “On the contrary: God’s simplicity is the end-result of ascribing to God all the perfections of creatures to the ultimate divine degree.” He would have done better if he had drawn the so-called *end*-result from Scripture as his *starting* point, from the revealed top down, rather than from the reasoned bottom up. The third part is right on again, “By describing God as the ‘utterly simple essence,’ we state that he is the perfect and infinite fullness of being, an ‘unbounded ocean of being.’” See also RD, II, 331, “Only by the Trinity (as revealed in Scripture) do we begin to understand that God as he is in himself—hence also, apart from the world—is the independent, eternal omniscient, and all-benevolent One, love, holiness, glory. The Trinity reveals God to us as the fulness of being, the true life, eternal beauty.” See for this also, Kamphuis, 22, 176, 187-188, “Once the immutability of God is seen as a perfection of the *Triune* God, the danger of equating our Lord’s immutability with the immobility of the pure being of the god-idea of apostate philosophy is *in principle* nullified.”

⁴⁸² It is this hostile “state of affairs” that is diagnosed as such in the Colossian heresy and promptly condemned by Paul. The hostility of the (rational) universal towards the (material) particulars, was so engrained in this heresy that it insisted on “ascetic abstinence” from the physical material. Paul debunks this as a mere “show” of wisdom in “fake” humility that cannot defeat the sinful longings of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23). In this we cannot but sense the disciple-making and disciple-teaching heart of the Apostle with a view to holiness. We could well wish, if not should expect that all theological “contributions” of whatever sort would convey this same sense, if not state it explicitly. Then “theology” would (finally) be “application!”

⁴⁸³ See Bavinck, RD, II, 177; Frame, ST, 44-46, 701.

Further, we should recognize that in the failure, if not refusal incessantly to focus upon the “proclamation of God’s authoritative, necessary, sufficient and perspicuous truth” with a view to repentance and faith unto holiness as God’s way to advance and establish his Kingdom (Mt. 13:18-23; Acts 2:16-40; 17:22-34), we encounter one of the root causes of the ecclesiastical downgrades that have plagued Church History again and again. Any and each theo-ontological endeavor can only curb, thwart, or derail the Church in what is and should be its incessant, entrepreneurial, grand, and magnificent obsession, mirroring the Grand Threefold Command of the ever Majestic and Transcendent God the Son (Mt. 28:18), who is simultaneously the ever Immanently Present Son of God (Mt. 28:21).

Finally, all those who conclude that this volume presented a persuasive case will undoubtedly agree that we should bemoan, if not lament the fact that philosophy-infested content-scholasticism spent centuries of time and energy to try to get a handle, in the words of Wolfgang Musculus, on the “secret depths of the Triune God.” The upshot, at least in the Middle Ages, was all too often a to be expected chaos of unverifiable conclusions, argued by thinkers who without a doubt were extremely gifted but at the same time constantly at war with each other. Post-Reformation scholasticism was much more streamlined but, as we saw, frequently was just as focused upon the so-called “hidden depths” as their Medieval predecessors. All at the neglect, if not expense of “the only thing needful.” Only the Judgment can and will tell how many souls starved to eternal death through the failure to fill the cup of the nations with the Gospel and how much holiness went by the board through the failure subsequently to fill it with the Word. The Reformation justly pointed the accusing finger at the Church of its days. So did Puritanism. The development of a robust Systematic Theology on the part of our Reformed and orthodox forebears, based upon all the data of Holy Writ, never was, never is and never will be the issue. Neither is it a luxury. No, it is an indisputable necessity to get a vision of the awesome fullness of God’s Word, and more precisely to be gripped by its full-orbed content. But let it never seek to enter, or even nibble at God’s “secrets,” and let it be always theoretical-*practical*, that is, systematically summarize truth-unto-life, walk-in-the-Word, learning-for-living, that is, for life as it is in hot pursuit of the Triple Command of our Commander in Chief, which is the only mandate that must govern and direct every nook and cranny of both the corporate Church and every believer’s existence.

In sum, let us honor the incomprehensible complementarity of truth and refuse to plumb it and make it comprehensibly intelligible. Let us embrace it in and with our regenerate heart, rejoice in its harmony and be grateful about the peace and the joy that this produces. Then, let us respond in kind to God *on the very accommodating level* on which he reveals himself and refuse to reason, that is, to speculate how his terminological self-disclosure on our “ectypal” level should be explained in the light of his unknowable “archetypal” essence. We are fully aware what it means on the human level “to be vexed,” “to grieve,” “to relent,” “to be angry,” “to be patient,” and for that matter, “to love,” “to hate,” “to suffer long,” etc., etc. So let us take them at face value, focus on the unmistakable *message* that they convey, and *immediately* respond with the corresponding expressed or implied God-required “ethics,” without *ever* making *any* attempt to figure out how these verbs that God applies to himself might relate to his “essence.” If this makes Medieval and Post-Reformation Scholasticism collapse to the extent that it focused on “essence” and grievously overlooked,

Commented [HK6]:

ignored and violated the threefold mandate contained in Deuteronomy 29:29, let it collapse, and let us once and for all refrain from following in its theo-ontological footsteps.⁴⁸⁴

This concludes the focus upon a question that was meant for the Classical Immutabilists. The following question is directed to the Mutabilists!

There is no doubt that many Mutabilists hold to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture and wish to make this their sole *principium cognoscendi*. There is no doubt either that they felt compelled to assign temporality and mutability to God because of what the text of Scripture appears to imply.

But now the question! As has been suggested, do Mutabilists per chance yield to the temptation to turn God, whether consciously and intentionally or not, into something like “the main character” in the “drama of Scripture?” In his speaking and responding, his acting and reacting he looks so much a part of history, so human, so temporal, so mutable, and so passable! In fact, at times he assumes human form. As a result, does it not seem appropriate, or more precisely, does it not appear necessary to attach all too human traits to his Being as well? Of all things, by good and necessary consequence!? This question may suggest itself despite the factual light that God never presents himself as temporal in Scripture. To the contrary, the general tenor of Scripture does not present him as just another “character” who speaks and acts as if he is “creaturely” embedded in time and “creaturely” subject to change. He is the awesome “Author of Scripture,” whom we encounter in Scripture again and again in his Sovereign Transcendence in real life situations, also in his speaking/responding and acting/reacting.⁴⁸⁵ Of course, we face mystery in all this. How in the world can the eternal and immutable God inter-speak and inter-act with his temporal and mutable creation, inclusive of his temporal and mutable creatures, as he reportedly does?

Well, same tune, different verse. Complementarity of truth that does not fit into the finite brain! It spells mystery that is part and parcel of the “secrets” of God. So, much-needed refusal arrogantly even to touch it is called for. How about also here opting for a child-like embrace of a regenerate heart that can simultaneously and harmoniously encompass both total Divine Transcendence and total Divine immanence without exhaustively comprehending their interrelationship? If God can make a bush burn without consuming it,

⁴⁸⁴ It is both interesting and telling that Jonathan Edwards appeared to prefer what I perceive to be the post-scholastic volumes of Mastricht, apparently (by far?), over the scholastic works of Turretin. As we saw, Mastricht sees some usefulness in scholasticism. But his systematic treatment of Biblical doctrines, although following a definite, clearly delineated, and strictly followed method to make things clear and memorable, moves from my perspective well beyond the Medieval and Post-Reformation content-scholasticism.

⁴⁸⁵ So, Katherine Sonderegger, quoted in Long, PSTG, 372. See also Vanhoozer, 469-504, esp., 482, 485, 486, about the “Author” concept. “God is the holy Author – the Creator of all things, visible and invisible – in our midst.” This “acknowledges the intimacy of God’s agential dealings *ad extra* with the world while simultaneously preserving the ultimacy of God’s Authorial life *ad intra*. Even more succinctly: remember that God is the wholly Author in our midst.” This comes close to an assertion of the complementarity of truth. But not quite! He still talks in terms of tension. “The narrative accounts of what God says and does as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must be held in tension with the apophatic implications of God’s ‘metaphysical’ name: ‘I am who I am’ (Ex. 3:14), and ‘The one who assumes human (created) form is the divine (uncreated) Author.’ This is the tension between ‘God’s self-communicative activity’ and his ‘metaphysics’ that he seeks to preserve. The (human) description of God’s activity must be balanced by the acknowledgment of his (Divine) being. ‘They must be mutually corrective,’ with reference to C. S. Lewis. Frankly, all ‘tension’ dissolves in the regenerate heart. This turns the evangelistic ‘making of disciples’ into such an utterly necessary enterprise. Without it no one can ever escape a contrastive view of reality and will ever suffer shipwreck in his or her undertakings, whether in whole (as a full-fledged unbeliever) or in part (as a truncated believer)!”

he can certainly communicate with man in time, without relinquishing, adjusting, or supplementing his eternity. And then, how about climbing the summit of bold humility! This is to say, let's put aside all speculative theo-ontology, gird on "The Eternal New Covenant Gospel" and go after souls in all nations with a vengeance and subsequently, after they call on the name of the Lord and are baptized as "proof" of their new identity, do the same with the Eternal Word and go after their holiness with an equal vengeance.

If all this has any ring of truth, both scholastic Immutabilists and the more recent Mutabilists, whether in whole or on part, ironically err in the same way. We do not detect an *explicit* acknowledgment of the complementarity of truth in either camp.⁴⁸⁶ Even if it would be present, no *expressed* fear to cross the line of God's secrets. All too frequently continuation in an ivory tower of speculation. No appreciable difference in the hands-on practice of life. The at times heated polemics, once again, resemble (are?) "a verbal tempest in a mental teapot."

Furthermore, no expressed recognition of the virtual downfall of the worship of God in the Middle East and increasingly in the West. Neither a concerted effort to determine the possible reason for this heart-breaking situation. No hint that the apparent judgment upon a deteriorating condition starts with acknowledging the holiness of an utterly Transcendent God. No alarm to the converted to embrace and obey Christ's Triple Command as the sole justification for their existence. When "Rome" is burning, "elitist" types of erudite deliberations, that are misdirected to boot, can hardly be expected to meet destructive fires hands-on, let alone to extinguish them.

If this has any further ring of truth to it, one cannot but conclude to an essential "arrogance," whether conscious and intentional or not, on the part of practitioners of theo-ontology for which repentance appears to be the only proper and acceptable response. As a marvelous by-product there will be no more Church splits or breaking of fellowship based upon a doctrinal edifice that cannot be corroborated Scripturally. Instead, combined with the abdication of any more speculative undertakings that may well come down to ontological speculations which cannot be substantiated, there will be an overwhelming eagerness to stand shoulder to shoulder, to march arm in arm, and to act hand in hand in the hot pursuit of Christ's Triple Command.

The outcome? Justifiable expectation of "the greater works" that Jesus held out in prospect to get the job of an innumerable multitude done. Peter set the tone with 3000 conversions in one day (Acts 2:41), soon to turn into 5000 (Acts 4:4) and into 25000 (?) (Acts 6:7). Revival torrents of living and life-giving Holy Spirit water burst "spontaneously" forth from the Church and flooded the nations, Jerusalem (Acts 2:41), Samaria (Acts 8:4ff), Antioch (Acts 11:19ff), Rome (Acts 28:30-31) and onward until Malachi 1:11 became a reality! Whatever Medieval or Reformed scholasticism (may) have accomplished, they

⁴⁸⁶ James E. Dolezal, "Agency, Concurrence, and Evil: A Study in Divine Providence," in *Journal of IRBS Theological Seminary* (2019), 61-89, writes an excellent survey on Divine concurrence with human agents, especially related to the so-called problem of evil. But no reference is made to the complementarity of truth in deciphering some of the ins and outs. Frankly, this is the only way to be an effective eye-opener. God's twofold truth does not fit in the human intellect, but has a cognitive, volitional, and emotional resting place in the regenerate heart. Emphasizing this would have given the "study" a necessary evangelistic cutting edge. Without the proclaimed, applied, and embraced New Covenant Gospel it will never arrive there!

certainly did not leave spontaneous Amazon-type Holy Spirit rivers in their wake.⁴⁸⁷ This must at least give us pause!

⁴⁸⁷ Apparently, the Amazon is such a mighty river that the trillions (?) of gallons of water that it pours into a salty ocean ensures that the latter is sweet miles away from shore.

XIII. A Pastoral Appeal (II)

All this, of course, prompts a final question. What to do with and what to say about the concepts of Divine Immutability and Divine Simplicity?⁴⁸⁸ This deserves and now will get our full attention. Well, both are taught in Scripture. Hence, they must be approached and defined in terms of Scripture, in terms of Scripture only, and in terms of all of Scripture, without the necessary assistance of any so-called “handmaiden” which ultimately wishes to be the “mistress.”

This is to say, all philosophical adumbrations that aim to make these concepts more palatable, let alone more intelligible must be shunned if the *Sola Scriptura* principle is fully to hold sway.⁴⁸⁹ No other sources, specially not extra-biblical “hand-maidens” of the questionable sort are welcome. They are not even needed! The glorious, unmatched, and unmatchable *Sola Scriptura principium* must, and is more than capable to rule the proceedings. But the defining process must be guided by *all* of Scripture as well. *Sola Scriptura* must go hand in hand with *Tota Scriptura*. So, let’s go, and take a look, first at Divine Immutability and then at Divine Simplicity.

Divine Immutability is taught in Scripture. It has two main features. These correspond with God in his a-temporal eternity *and* with him as he speaks and acts in time.⁴⁹⁰ This is too often missed in sufficient detail or even misconstrued. Most Systematic theologies endorse Divine immutability in terms of God’s being, his “internal” functions, such as his thinking, his willing and his feeling (?),⁴⁹¹ as well as his “essential” perfections, such as, his goodness, his holiness, etc., etc., and his plans, such as his decrees. But then they wonder how this does and can square with the way he inter-speaks and inter-acts with his creation, that is, how it matches up with the display of unmistakable patterns of change of relationships and actions. In short, what is the precise interplay between “eternity” and “temporality?”

To solve this “conundrum” some interpreters emphasize the “contrast,” put “eternity” into the stratosphere beyond the reach of man, and subsequently (consequently?) all of God with it, and refer to incomprehensibility to explain, if not to justify this. In order to retain

⁴⁸⁸ For the doctrine of Divine Immutability, see also Muller, PRRD, III, 308-320; Turretin, IET, I, 204-206; Mastricht, II, 154-163; Bavinck, RD, II, 153-159; Frame, ST, 367-377, as well as Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 235-242; and for Divine Simplicity, Muller, PRRD, III, 70-77, 271-298; Turretin, IET, I, 191-194; Mastricht, II, 142-153; Bavinck, II, 118-131, 173-177; and Horton, 228-230.

⁴⁸⁹ For this see also Zwingli, who according to Muller, PRRD, III, 87, “protests against philosophical attempts to understand the divine nature and declares all such speculation false ... Theology ought to begin with the biblical revelation of God’s ‘absolute being’ in Exodus 3:13-16.”

⁴⁹⁰ I am fully aware that the ascription of timeless eternity to God is a much debated, if not controversial issue. Scripture never explicitly defines eternity as “timeless.” In fact, because it is a document that is time-bound it would not even be able to do so. But as I already stated, the Biblical disclosure of Divine transcendence is so awesome and its emphasis upon its towering reality so overwhelming that it does not make any sense to hold that time would be anything else but a created entity. Of course, the recognition that God’s creation *ex nihilo* includes both time and space as simultaneously spoken into being together with all that is found in them (Ps. 33:9) does and should seal God’s transcendence of time once and for all.

⁴⁹¹ More about the propriety or impropriety to speak of God’s “feeling(s),” see below!

“some” knowledge of “eternity” and of all of God, they use the three not quite successful *viae* to arrive at this knowledge,⁴⁹² and virtually allow incomprehensibility to swallow it up by designating it as “analogical,” which, as we saw repeatedly, is *admittedly* a murky and foggy concept that defies all meaningful definition.⁴⁹³ Other interpreters are understandably suspicious of this “contrastive” approach and decided to bridge the gap by nullifying what creates the gap, namely the insistence that God is non-temporally eternal. So, they simply deny that the gap exists and, in the process, have “eternity” virtually vanish into “temporality” and immutability into “mutability.” A third type of interpreters refuses to go that far. They hold that “eternity” adds “temporality” to its arsenal upon God’s creative activity that gives rise to both time and space, inclusive all that is subject to it or contained in it. In short, the eternal and immutable God (by necessity) assumes supplementary temporality and mutability upon his *creatio ex nihilo*. All three types of interpreters are apparently persuaded that there is something jarring that needs to be explained, if not solved.⁴⁹⁴ In a word, all parties start out with a “contrastive” view that they wish to plumb, either questionably explain it, seeking to harmonize or synthesize the two poles, or illegitimately dismiss it, having the one pole absorb its counterpart.⁴⁹⁵

In analyzing all this, the immediate observation is warranted that in these three types of interpretation there is no evidence at all of a 20-20 vision of the complementarity of truth which comes face to face with the mystery of the “secrets” of God that cannot and may not be probed, demands worship as well as obedience to what is mandated.⁴⁹⁶ Complementary of truth always conveys that there are two “orders” of truth, the “eternal” and the “temporal” one, the precise interrelationship of which is *in toto* hidden to the human mind, such as the Two (Divine and human) Natures of Christ in One Person, or Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. Both components are revealed in Scripture. Both are fully harmonious. Both must be simultaneously embraced by the regenerate heart. By virtue of the same heart all this must culminate in full in the all-encompassing ethics of everyday life. Without this hands-on culmination zenith even the most glorious theoretical-practical edifice is like a “Landmark Cathedral that lacks a Roof.”

Scripture discloses the very same complementary pattern when it comes down to Divine Immutability. It indicates that there are two “orders” of Immutability.⁴⁹⁷ In the “first order”

⁴⁹² Holmes, OHST, 57, argues that the *via negationis* and the *via eminentiae* “rely on the assumptions that we know which aspects of human existence are positive and which are limitations.” The *via causalitatis* relies on the assumption that good logical arguments can be made from the nature of effects to their cause.” He holds that “the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* denies the existence of well-formed logical arguments that move from details of the created order to facts about the creator.” Hence, he regards “the *via causalitatis* a dead end.”

⁴⁹³ See for this once again Holmes, “Attributes,” in OHST, 62, who underscores this with a reference to the pointed critique of Duns Scotus that “analogy necessarily collapses into equivocation, unless there exists some underlying univocal concept.”

⁴⁹⁴ Bavinck, RD, II, 153-170; and more recently, Michael Horton, *The Cristian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 235-242; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 367-377.

⁴⁹⁵ The history of Western philosophy should serve as a permanent warning against either such procedure. In both its ancient and modern garb, it mostly sought to the two poles of the basically contrastive “universality” and “particularity” poles, and never did, does, or will succeed. Parmenides had “universality” swallow “particularity” and did not fare any better.

⁴⁹⁶ One instance of acknowledged mystery is Eccl. 8:17. The context shows that this is met with heartfelt and child-like surrender.

⁴⁹⁷ This “two order” concept should not (never!) come as a surprise. It is bound up with the interrelated Creator-creature distinction and is on display throughout Scripture. The two orders are not “univocal.” This would eliminate

(*ordo essendi aeternae*, order of eternal being) God is immutable in what is his “a-temporal eternity,” with all that this entails for his internal functions, his essential perfections, and his decreed plans. For many of these non-mutating and non-mutable (without succession of time) eternal components,” go to Jam. 1:17 in conjunction with 1 Tim. 1:17 and Ps. 57:15a, and in this light also to Num. 23:19a; Deut. 32:39a; 33:11, 27a; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; Job 42:2; Ps. 16:8; 21:7; 33:11; 89:34-37; 90:1-2; 110:4; 102:25-27; 110:4; Prov. 19:21; Is. 4:34; 40:21; 41:4; 43:13; 44:6-10; 54:9-10; Jer. 4:28; 7:15; Ezek. 5:11; 14:16; 20:3; 24:14; 33:27; 35:6; Mic. 7:19-20; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; 9:11; 11:29; 15:4; 2 Tim. 2:13; 3:16-17; Tit. 1:2; and Hebr. 6:17-20; 7:21.

In the “second order” (*ordo communicationis temporalis*, order of temporal inter-communication) which corresponds with this, God is equally immutable in the way in which he inter-speaks and interacts in the “temporal” context. Go for its over-all pattern to Jer. 18:5-10, and in this light also to Gen. 6:6-7; 18:16-33; Ex. 32:10-14; Num. 23:19b; 1 Sam. 15:29; Jer. 26:3, 13, 19; Jonah 3:9. He spells out in detail what he does and will do, and how he will respond and react. So, no surprise, he acted, responded, and reacted exactly how he spelled this out.⁴⁹⁸ In short, God is immutable in his Transcendent essence and immutable in

“distinction!” Neither are they “equivocal.” This would jettison “interrelationship!” To take refuge in the concept of “analogy” is a doomed effort to make the mysterious “half-way” intelligible. Bottom line: their relationship is and remains a mystery, apart from the biblical truth that “the first order” is “fundamental,” in fact, the transcendental condition for “the second order.” The closest approximation, according to Scripture, is the use of the term “concurrence.” It conveys that 100% (“first order”) + 100% (“second order”) = 100%. To identify three classic samples, (1) it is on display in Scripture as simultaneously the Word of God and the word of men. (2) It is also predicated of the Providence of God in which all historical occurrences are simultaneously attributable to Divine as well as to human agency (Gen. 50:19-20 // Ps. 105:16-17). (3) The last sample is the Divine Sovereignty-human responsibility relationship (Acts 4:27-28). Further, that God’s 100% has the (transcendental) primacy over man’s 100% is a biblical given as well (Am. 3:6b; John 1:12-13). But the exact relationship of the two components of the concurring double 100% is not spelled out. It is one of the “ontological” secrets of God that we are told to *leave alone*. Nevertheless, in each of these instances 100% + 100% = 100%. This spells impenetrable mystery, to be lodged in our hearts in a childlike manner. At the same time, it is incumbent upon all of us fully to honor all three components. After all, “100% + 0% = 0%,” and “0% + 100% = 0%” as well. So, under God, that is, from, through and unto God, as he has revealed himself in his descriptive “sovereignty” and prescriptive “governance,” only “100% + 100% = 100%” did, does, and will do!

⁴⁹⁸ It is quite clear from Scripture that God does not always “respond” in word and “react” in deed in the same way. At times he relents (Ex. 32:9-14; 2 Ki. 20:1-6; Jonah 4:1-2; Am. 7:1-6). At times he does not (Ps. 110:4; Jer. 4:28; Ezek. 24:14). At times it is uncertain whether he will or not (Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:13-14). This can be explained in the following fashion. In each instance God’s sovereign and immutable plan plays a foundational and governing role. While apparently it is not always predictable (Joel), it is always the embodiment and serves the display of the sum-total of his perfections. When his holiness prevails, relenting is “out.” When his love does, it is “in.” When he threatens destruction in his holiness, his love may “load” it with an “unspoken urge” to pray unto relenting, and for an “unspoken condition” to repent unto relenting. When his holiness is ignored, his love is rejected, and repentance is absent, relenting is “out” (Jer. 38:14-27). When prayer is present (Abraham, Moses, Hezekiah) relenting may be expected. When repentance is present (Nineveh), relenting occurs. See for this amazing, worship-worthy, “intricate tapestry” also, John Calvin, *Institutes*, I, xvii, 14; and Bavinck, RD, II, 153, “Scriptures testify that amidst all this alternation (such as, Num. 11:1, 10; Ps. 106:40; Zech. 10:3 vs. Deut. 1:7; 2 Chron. 12:12; 30:8; Jer. 18:8, 10; 26:3, 19; 36:3) God is and remains the same.” Incidentally, the Hebrew term for “relenting” is *nacham*. According to Ludwig Koehler-Walter Baumgartner, eds, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), 608-609, its basic meaning is “to be sorry,” (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:12, 14; 1 Sam. 15:11, 29, 35; Am. 7:3, 6), or “to repent” (Job 42:6). Newer translation at times read it as conveying “a change of mind” (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29) or a “relenting” (Am. 7:3, 6). Frame, ST, 368, prefers not to use the verb “to repent,” when it pertains to God, since he does not repent of sin. It is clearly a complex verb (It can also mean “to comfort;” Gen. 24:67). Apparently, what comes into play in our context is an

his Immanent governance. These “two orders” are not contrastive. Neither do just run parallel, at best, passing like “ships in the night.” No, the former serves as an essential, sufficient, and unshakable foundation for the latter and so gives rise to it, controls it, and directs it, just as in the incarnation Deity assumed humanity, and in history Divine Sovereignty anchors human responsibility, and sets it in motion. Thus, the immutable eternal God lays out his immutable blueprint for and displays his footprint of all his temporal speech and action.⁴⁹⁹

In all candor, complementary truths are and must appear mutually contradictory to the finite and tiny (pea-brain) mind of man. Of course, the unregenerate heart, claiming the ultimacy of the intellect, dismisses such truths out of hand as self-destructive in its self-contradiction. Regrettably, the regenerate heart, operating with the primacy of the intellect seeks to puzzle them out and ends up in quagmire of divergent views. But the regenerate heart, embracing them in full, worships and puts all its brain power into high gear to understand what God *mandates* and puts all its energies to work in a life of *obedience* that is bracketed by Christ’s Triple Grand Command.

In short, lodging the mystery of complementary truth in one’s brand-new life-mission control center with its double occupancy (Eccl. 3:11a) produces mental, volitional, and emotional serenity and rest. But because it cannot fathom its full scope (Eccl. 3:11b), it either will not probe or will stop probing the impenetrable. For that reason, it is able exclusively to gear up, finally and fully, to pursue all the ethics that is disclosed by the twofold Immutable God throughout Scripture, which like a mighty river ends up in the triple pronged Delta of the Grand Command, poised and primed to irrigate all the nations to the glory of God! In the process those who are “grabbed” by this will lament the untold hours and untold energies spent (wasted) to produce untold articles and untold volumes to penetrate God’s essence at the expense of the pursuit of God’s ethics and cannot but pray that either a new or a purified heart will remedy this.

All in all, I fear that this theo-ontological exercise in ultimately arrogant futility reached its zenith in Medieval content-scholasticism that withered the Church. This was mostly

emotion that can lead a change of course or action, but not necessarily a change of mind. More about how to interpret this below when we deal with the “emotion” aspect.

⁴⁹⁹ For an illuminating survey of the way both the Reformers and the Reformed orthodox perceived and taught the doctrine of Divine Immutability, see Muller, PRRD, III, 308-320, 551-561. As the term indicates, it essentially conveys that God does not “mutate” in any way, shape, or form, whether in his being (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17), in his attributes, or in his excellencies, such as, his knowledge, his will, and his plan. In *none* of this he can be superseded, augmented, diminished, resisted, come up short, decline, let alone be hoodwinked or corrupted (Ex. 3:14-16; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 33:11; 90:2; 102:26-27; 110:4; Is. 14:24; 46:10; Rom. 11:29; Prov. 19:21; Prov. 21:30; Mt. 5:18; Heb. 6:17. When they are confronted with passages in Scripture that do point to “mutation” of whatever kind (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:12, 14; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; Am. 7:3, 6), their retort is threefold. 1. The larger array of texts must prevail over the “few.” Frankly, this is not very cogent. 2. The “proper” language of Scripture concerning the nature of God in the vast array of texts must be distinguished from the “improper” and “figurative” language in the few (figurative due to our capacity). That Scripture uses figures of speech and is accommodating (throughout!) can and must be immediately granted. But to call the language of Scripture “improper” is unacceptable and dangerous for reasons stated below. 3. “The change is not in God, but in his works.” This is a frequent argument (Muller, PRRD, III, 558; Baines, CIG, 63-66, 154, 320, 349). But, while the text clearly entails a change in God’s works, it clearly says more than this. Finally, “sanctified” sense does, should, in fact, must resist mutation in God. It would mean that he would change either for the better or for the worse. Both would fly in the face of him as a perfect God. Further, it would have to be precipitated by someone superior to him. This is equally unacceptable, if not abhorrent. For practical implications of this doctrine, see Mastricht, TPT, I, 161-163; Bavinck, RD, II, 156; and Muller, PRRD, III, 319-320. More about this below as well.

derailed by the Reformation. It revived in part in Post-Reformation scholasticism, which had to damage the buoyant life of the Church. Pietism and Puritanism sidelined it to a great extent. But it never disappeared and seems to be on the comeback trail again. In all candor, one thing the history of content-Scholasticism is teaching us. To whatever extent it was practiced, the Church declined and seemed to cry out for relief. To whatever extent it was leashed, the Church revived and blossomed again. Really, what else can one expect to happen when the theo-ontological focus upon the intricacies and minutiae that would provide a mental image of the contours and possibly the content of the “secrets” of God, is replaced by the Spirit-filled proclamation of God’s living, powerful, convicting and healing Holy Word with a burden for souls and holiness?

The practical implications and applications of all this are immense. For a starter, the twofold Divine Immutability puts God’s Macro-Management, as expressed in Christ’s Triple Command in immutable concrete. This is “what” he immutably planned, and this is “how” he immutably governs. To “rebel” in one way or another will never change this plan. Ironically, every act of rebellion of whatever kind, inclusive of God’s change of course or of action that result from it (Go, Figure), is and will incomprehensibly prove to be an incontestable part of that plan which in the Judgment culminates in the full and majestic display of his Trinitarian Glory and in the equally full and majestic exhibition of the Sum-total of his Perfections, as much as both are possible on the creaturely level. Further, “rebellion” may, can, does, or will cause Divine “vexation,” “grief,” “anger,” wrath,” once again, inclusive of all the subsequent “actions” that may, can, do, or will flow forth from them. In these “actions” God invariably displays his perfection or perfections that he chooses to display, that is, all according to his eternal plan, which will prove in the end to be a “plan-to-perfection.” That is, a plan in which all its “strands,” Divine and human, however incomprehensible in their interrelationship, finally are shown to form an entirely congruent and harmonious masterpiece, in which all God’s perfections will effusively shine to the full! Since its “demonstration” undoubtedly will come down to a “performance,” its “echo” will just as undoubtedly reverberate throughout eternity. Let us take a closer look at this.

According to this “plan,” God was “grieved” enough to drown “the world” in deserved wrath. But at the same time, he loved it so much that he gave it his Son in underserved mercy. “The wormhole of Noah” was the appointed *trait d’union* to proceed from point A to point B. God’s clearly immutable “plan” had Moses take Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:10). But when Moses “vexed,” etc., God, he sought to execute him (Ex. 4:24). Both Pharaoh and Israel were fully part of this “plan” as well. But he demonstrated his power in Pharaoh and his mercy in Israel (Rom. 9:14-18). God was equally “vexed,” etc. with Saul and David. But he meted out his deserved judgment upon Saul, and his undeserved grace upon David. To top all this off with Judas, he was God’s “plan,” appointed by Jesus to his inner circle after a night of prayer, undoubtedly “to do his thing” (Lk. 6:12-16). But he was fully responsible for his treacherous deed, which he recognized and admitted as such (Mt. 27:4). It would have been better for him never to have been born in the first place (Mt. 26:24).

When “my” mind is confronted about all this by critical “outsiders” with the (deriding?) charge of an “all too anomalous and illogical, if not a jarring self-contradictory quagmire,” and with the (scoffing?) challenge of “go and try figure all this out,” it simply smiles. Captured *and* captivated, that is fully seized *and* quite enthralled by the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5; Jam. 1:1), it promptly refers the charge and the challenge to “my” regenerate heart as its “final court of adjudication.” “Supernaturally,” this heart experiences perfect

peace in the whole matter and dismisses the charge *and* the challenge out of hand. In fact, it (thoughtfully) turns into a Prosecuting Attorney and (in no uncertain words) reverses both with a pointed question, “Who are you ‘to bark’ against God” (Rom. 9:20)? But there is (much) more! Simultaneously entrusted with the role of Defense Attorney, it (compassionately) “becomes all things to all men” (with the message of the New Covenant Gospel) with a hopefully saving outcome (1 Cor. 9:22). More details about this dual function below, specifically as it mirrors the simplicity of God.

To summarize, do we encounter here totally sovereign realities and radically incomprehensible truths? Absolutely! So, why would we not (decide to) “shut up” in the face of all this for our life’s sake (Rom. 9:20-24), *and* why would we not look forward to, if not “hasten” ourselves in practical godliness to arrive at the Day that God’s Triune Glory, together with the Sum-total of his perfections, will be on its fullest display! Is there anyone still too tied up in mental knots about all this? Well, why not be or become child-like, and in case of need, aspire for a “dust and ashes type” of heart-felt and heart-changing repentance in the footsteps of the one who is recorded to be the most righteous human being, bar none (Job 1:8; 42:6)?⁵⁰⁰

At any rate, rather than taking (loads of) time curiously to inquire into or puzzle out the “incomprehensibility” of God’s being (Trinity), God’s actions (the “why” or the “how”), or even God’s language (“vexation”) in whatever way or to whatever degree, let all this sink in, until we recognize that the God who loves the world and shows it in his Son Jesus (John 3:16) is, and remains, a “consuming fire” (Hebr. 12:29). This should hasten us to concentrate on revealed Divine “ethics,” culminating in Christ’s Triple Command. If God is so “vexed” with his “appointed but disobedient” Moses that he sets out to “kill” him (Ex. 4:24), Christ with his own “body” that he is willing to spit it out (Rev. 3:16), and the Holy Spirit with those who insult him that his judgment is in the inescapable offing (Hebr. 10:29), why would they not target “me,” if I overlook, ignore, defy, or protest his “ethics?” The very “ethics” that I *must* pursue, at times following fruit-bearing repentance (Ex. 4:25-26), but always *can* pursue in faith and “through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)? What a (*non*-theo-ontological) incentive to seek and receive the smile of God. See for this emphatically Psalm 90, esp. 11-12 as well!

However, there are equally impressive and glorious implications and applications in the framework of God’s Micro-Management! When we fall in line with God’s Macro-Management, we can be assured of his Immutable Presence in word and in deed (Mt. 28:21b). This Presence spells total reliability, total consistency, total fidelity, and total trustworthiness. The life of God’s people, inclusive, by definition, of their ministry, with all its vagaries, its ups and downs, is immensely variegated and complex. But his words, whether of injunction, promise, threat, or otherwise, can always be counted on (Is. 40:8)! In all this God is their ever-enduring “Rock” (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 102:12; see also Jam. 1:17; Hebr. 13:8). No wonder that the pay-off of carefully listening to his words, all of them, and just as carefully obeying them, all of them as well, is awesome! Both Scripture and Church History testify to this innumerable times in innumerable ways, all questionings, all doubts, all protestations, and all scoffing to the contrary. His deeds, whether already “a done deal” in the past (Ps. 103:10), occurring in the present (Prov. 19:21), promised for the future (Is.

⁵⁰⁰ All this makes the thesis increasingly tenuous that on “this terrestrial ball” theologians should feel free, if it is not incumbent upon them to make at least an effort to unravel the so-called mystery of incomprehensibly complementary truths as much as possible to make them intelligible as much as possible. See for this once again **Spotlight I!**

40:10-11; 46:20), or said to cover all of history (Ps. 103:17-19; Is. 40:7-8) speak for themselves as well. In fact, God's past deeds lay the foundation, pave the way, display the nature, and guarantee the reality for his future ones. This does and should produce trust, contentment, gratitude, if not unreserved joy about and in the present as well as hope, confidence, determination, empowerment to face, if not passion to head into the future. The astounding pay-offs of God's Immutability (plural on purpose) are staggering, indeed.⁵⁰¹

Turning now to the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, we encounter the same over-all picture.⁵⁰² For a starter, the same twofold pattern or "order" appears to emerge, a simplicity of transcendence (first "order," *ordo essendi aeternae*, order of eternal being) and a simplicity of immanence (second "order," *ordo communicandi temporalis*, order of temporal inter-communication). The doctrine of simplicity essentially denies the reality or possibility of any, and all kinds of "composition." In a word, God is "not only free from composition and division but also incapable of composition and divisibility."⁵⁰³ This is underscored by the fact that "God's attributes are God." They are his essence. God's justice is God. God's faithfulness is God, etc., etc. They are also united in his essence, intertwined in his essence, and so qualify each other, in "simple multiplicity and multiple simplicity" (Augustine).⁵⁰⁴

This, however, as we already saw, does not exclude personal relations, such as paternity, filiation, and spiration in God. Neither is such the case with relative attributes, such as omniscience and holiness. These are not components, but distinctions!⁵⁰⁵ Once more in Bavinck's refreshing "complementary" terminology, these distinctions in God are "real!"

⁵⁰¹ See for all this also Beeke, RST, I, 687-690. Petrus of Mastricht, II, 161-163, a highly esteemed 16th Century pastor and theologian, weighs in on this as well. He aspires to be and *is* throughout his publications theoretical-practical like clockwork. Following the exposition of every truth he concludes with "The Practical Part." He lists the following implications and applications of Divine Immutability. "The doctrine is profitable for the glorification of God, for "despising" creaturely items in comparison, for the detestation of sin of all kinds, for promoting confidence and providing comfort in needy circumstances, for "fleeing" inconsistency in one's conduct, and for the study of displaying a pattern of constancy in one's life. In this context Herman Bavinck, RD, II, 153-159, a highly respected 19th Century theologian may be mentioned as well. He also sees Divine Immutability portrayed in God as a "Rock (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 23:3, 32; Ps. 19:14; 31:3; 62:2, 7; 73:26, etc.)." This spells reliability on the part of God and urges reliance on the part of the believer.

⁵⁰² For a survey as to how the doctrine of Divine Simplicity was viewed through the centuries, especially by the 13th Century Medieval scholastics, the 16th Century Reformers and the 17th and 18th Century scholastic Reformed orthodoxy, a survey that is just as illuminating, if not more so, as his survey of Divine Immutability, see Muller, PRRD, III, 36-45, 53-58, 70-78, 136, 169, 195-198, 212, 226, 230, 234, 256, 273-284 (esp. 278), 286, 288-298, 431, 512, 547. There is total unanimity that simplicity spells "the most perfect unity of divine essence and attributes, excluding all real composition" (277). The Godhead is not only "devoid of all composition and division," but also "incapable of compositionability and divisibility" (278). While the Reformers were more biblically concrete and applicatory, and the post-Reformation thinkers more speculatively philosophical and metaphysical, both were in basic agreement with each other, as well as with the medieval doctors on this basic concept. However, all three also had to grapple with the nature of the "distinctions" in the Godhead not only in terms of God's Tri-personality but also with regards to his attributes. Especially in the arena of God's attributes there was not always unanimity of expression as they sought to identify the apparent "complexity of the Godhead." This should not come as a surprise since "simplicity" is unique to God and has no possible analogy in created reality. As we saw, already Augustine was not fully transparent in his statement that God is "uni-fold" and "mani-fold" at the same time.

⁵⁰³ Muller, PRRD, 277-28; Turretin, IET, I, 191.

⁵⁰⁴ See for this, Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 6.4.6; Bavinck, RD, II, 173; Beeke, RSTD, I, 626.

⁵⁰⁵ Turretin, IET, I, 193-194.

But they add “nothing real” to the essence of God!⁵⁰⁶ In fact, this is honoring complementarity of truth at its finest. Heartfelt child-like and worshipful submission to two facets of God’s one harmonious truth that are incomprehensible in their relationship to each other, and therefore defy any effort and preempt any misplaced zeal to probe (pry into!) this relationship!

At any rate, Scripture indicates, for one, that God’s perfections are not added to his essence. This would undercut his simplicity since it would turn him into a composite. No, they constitute his essence. This is also indicated by the abstract nouns that are predicated of God. He *is* truth (John 14:6b). He *is* life (John 14:6c). He *is* light (1 John 1:5). He *is* holiness (Is. 6:3). He *is* righteousness (Rev. 16:7). He *is* love (1 John 4:16). He *is* goodness (Rom. 2:4). He *is* faithfulness (Lam. 3:17), etc., etc., etc.⁵⁰⁷ Incidentally, the so-called “abstracts” give rise to the concretes. Because God *is* love, he loves, etc., etc.⁵⁰⁸ At the same time the concretes open a window upon the “abstracts.” Because he loves in the way he loves, he displays in which way he *is* love! The question now is how all this relates to his Transcendence and his

⁵⁰⁶ Bavinck, RD, II, 177. Not so incidentally, the use of the adjective “real” concerning “distinctions” in God is not without some “controversy.” Some deny that these distinctions are “real” for fear of fallen victim to composition in God. Others insist calling them “real” to safeguard the tri-personality of God. A whole slew of often adversarial proposals has been made in Church History how to get a grip on the distinctions. They have been adverbially designated as *realiter* (real), *virtualiter* (not actual), *modaliter* (representing a mode of subsistence), *eminenter* (eminent, compared to creaturely distinctions that always spell composition), *conceptualiter* (creaturely mental), *rationaliter* (by reason of analysis), or *formaliter* (“a distinction inherent in the very nature of a thing, but also, in a sense, a non-substantial distinction, a distinction unlike that between one substance and another”) (See for all this also, Muller, PRRD, III, 53-57, 70-76, 286-298). It is more than likely that this controversial “smorgasbord” simply “comes with the territory” when humans with their creaturely epistemology venture in the ontological “secrets” of God that have never been charted and cannot be charted, by universal admission (See for the latter, a. o., Muller, PRRD, III, 53-54)! If so, it could reveal the prevalence of deep-seated and Church-history long *hubris* that sought to penetrate the impenetrable time and again, necessarily at the expense of the pursuit of the mandated obedience (Deut. 29:29). All this can only be bolstered by the recognition that the various contributors to the above-mentioned smorgasbord, when push came to shove, never did make clear what their designations really designated (See for this also, Muller, PRRD, III, 56, “What Aquinas does not do (and nobody else either, hk) ... is to make clear precisely what kind of distinction there may be in the thing that is reflected in the distinction made by reason concerning the thing”). Of course, how could they? They entered like blind men into the impenetrable fog of the inaccessible essence of God. This is apparently behind the “distinction-denial (agnosticism?)” of Ockham “who ran aground on the doctrine of the Trinity, recognizing the inability of reason to penetrate its mystery, while upholding it in faith” (Muller, PRRD, III, 75-76). Maybe it is time for all of us to listen with open ears, mind, and heart to God’s eye-opening speech to Job, to tremble at its content, to repent of our arrogance, and to assign much of our content-scholasticism to the scrapheap of the divinely impermissible and inadmissible all too human so-called “good and necessary consequences.” It could well be that at this point Aquinas already came to our rescue. Why did he pen in retrospect at the close of his iconic life, “All I have written seems like straw to me?” Did he deep in his heart recognize that he somehow “missed the boat” in his theo-ontology? No one can be sure about this. But he seems to be the only theologian of name who characterizes his work like that at the end of his life. However, I am certain about one thing! Everybody did, does, or will make a (sizable?) contribution to “the wood, hay and stubble” that in the Judgment calls for the gigantic “bonfire” (1 Cor. 3:13) that once and for all will get rid of all the “malware” that Christians of all stripes have accumulated throughout the centuries, but regrettably so often and so mistakenly have treasured and presented as “gold, silver and precious stones.” This may well have prompted him to write this epitaph.

⁵⁰⁷ See for this also, Bavinck, RD, II, 173-174, 176-177. With reference to Jer. 10:10; 23:6; John 1:4-5, 9; 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:20, he concludes that “God as ‘utterly simple essence’ is the perfect and infinite fullness of being, an ‘unbounded ocean of being.’” Hence “his many names,” which provide us with “some idea of his profuse richness.” “Nothing can be added to him.” As such, he is “self-determined, self-sufficient, all-blessed, and distinct from everything else.”

⁵⁰⁸ It has been admitted that the relationship of the “abstract” and “concrete” in God is undefinable.

Immanence, and *vice versa*, or more precisely, how in all this his Transcendence and Immanence relate to each other.

Pertaining to his Immanence, to begin with, simplicity forbids us to make an appeal to God's essence to override one or more of his perfections. This is done when the biblical teaching on the conscious and indescribable punishment of rebel angels and humans in everlasting damnation as an instance of God's righteous justice is dismissed by an appeal to the essence of God as "love," specifically, ultimately, or even solely!

Further, it is equally forbidden to sideline one perfection in the name of another. This is done when in the current *hyper-grace* movement (really *truncated* 'grace'-movement), the need for a repentant heart and a righteous life in the face of the holiness of God is ignored, toned down, or even disdained as if this would (re)introduce the ever-threatening Siren Song of "works-righteousness." Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Also, the kaleidoscope of the sum-total of God's perfections that make up his essence may never be torn up or curtailed. This is done by David Hume in extolling his atheism. "If God is good, he cannot be God. If he is God, he cannot be good." This mantra is based upon the picture of God as (merely) "omni-potent" and "omni-benevolent." Research informs us that this curtailment was apparently "common ecclesiastical fare," on which Hume simply piggybacked. At any rate, he argues that this world's evil does not allow their simultaneity. "Hence, God does not exist." It is well-known fact that he fought the simplicity of God to make his mantra stick. He failed to envision the total kaleidoscope of God's perfections.⁵⁰⁹ He ignored that God's holiness is an essential aspect of this Sum-Total as well. The Book of Revelation would have shown him that the very "evil" he earmarked as such constitutes the righteous Judgment of God, which, "incidentally," also failed to effect repentance in Hume (Rev. 16:5-6, 9). If the research is correct that he reacted to, if not took the Church's (curtailed) teaching as his point of departure, the bottom line is that the Church failed to do its job, big time! It proclaimed a truncated God and so allowed Hume to put him in the dock and mock him! It could (should!) have used Eleonore Stump's analogy of physical light to show that its (immutable) "'whiteness' contained within it the *total* richness of *all* the (distinct) colors of light," *none* excepted. As a result, it would never have been content to be or become God's (publicly chastened, if not virtually subjugated) Defense Attorney, as is the near-universal stance of all theologians or philosophers who, facing Hume and his ilk, (merely) enter a "not-guilty" plea on God's part. The regrettably outcome admittedly (!) has been, is and ever will be a "Hung Jury" at best,⁵¹⁰ until Court is called in session again with a re-introduction of the old charge by a new, more virulent generation of self-proclaimed atheists.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Holmes, in OHST, 58-59, essentially warns against any, and all efforts to curtail or restrict the "span," that is, the expanse of God's perfections. Always cover the waterfront and take their sum-total into account. This echoed by Beeke, RST, 634, "wherever God is present, he is present with all his attributes." Really, shame on us if we do not proclaim God in the fullness of his Triune and omni-attributed glory! The deleterious outcome will soon raise its ugly head.

⁵¹⁰ Philosophers who have addressed the problem of evil can legitimately claim that logically they have stopped the atheistic onslaught against the existence of God. Atheists simply cannot compellingly make their case. By now this is a virtually unanimous verdict. But this came with a price. The "defenders" openly agree that they cannot make their case either. This comes down to a "Hung Jury!" Christians should be able to do better!

⁵¹¹ Both Dawson and Hitchings could be classified as "virulent atheists." They are not just content to state their case in defense of their atheism. They are on an aggressive warpath against theism of whatever sort, which they regard as an intolerable blight upon the human race!

No, “simplicity,” as we saw already, turns the Church into a Prosecuting Attorney on behalf of a Holy and Angry God and shows that the “accusers” are in the dock due to their (more or less unwittingly?) rebellious, and therefore foolish and self-destructive suppression of the truth of God (Ps. 14:1-3; Rom. 1:21)! Then that same “simplicity” turns it into a Defense Attorney on behalf of the “accused” by sharing the gospel of the love, grace, and mercy of God that holds out the prospect of a heart transplant which abhors its folly in repentant faith, with all that this entails in terms of forgiveness, holiness, culminating in eternal life. No “Theodicy” or “Defense” that I know of has ever taken on this double “role.” To our shame! God is immutably one in the distinction of his perfections. Even if these are not identical,⁵¹² they have the earmarks of immutable simplicity engraved upon them and at the same time carry a distinct weight. The “distinct” realities of heaven and hell are a case in point. On the one hand, both incontrovertibly reflect God’s holiness (simplicity). On the other hand, heaven is equally an incontrovertible display of God’s grace and hell an incontrovertible demonstration of his justice (distinction). What is the bottom line? Complementarity of truth, *and* therefore incomprehensible “mystery,” indeed!⁵¹³ Mystery that lodges harmoniously in the regenerate heart! The Prosecuting Attorney and the Defense Attorney are both the same and distinct. It appears that they are and function at the same time as embodied holiness and embodied love.

Rahab must have sensed some of God’s simplicity when she faced the death sentence due to the burning holiness and fully deserved anger of God. At the same time (despite this?), she was irresistibly drawn to him whatever the outcome would be, but clearly casting herself upon (hoping for? counting on?) his undeserved love, unmerited mercy, and unearned grace. With her embrace of the “simple” God she turned into the mother of Jesus. Oh,

⁵¹² The issue whether, and if so, how, and to what extent the perfections of God are to be distinguished from each other, has been “hotly” debated. Are they all “one” in the essence of God, and only “singled out” by the rationally super-imposed distinctions of our creaturely mind, without actually being diverse in God? Or does the diverse portrayal of Scripture mirror distinctions in the essence of God? Of course, only as “modes of subsistence, that is, not composing, but modifying the divine essence!” From this perspective “the claim of *real* (“italics, mine) distinctions between attributes proves just as dangerous to the Trinity as the utter denial of distinctions, in as much as it allows for no higher level of distinction within the divine essence by which the persons can be distinguished at the same time as the unity of the Godhead is preserved” (So, Muller, PRRD, III, 281-284, esp. 282). If I understand all this correctly, the jury was still out for Reformed scholasticism-as-a-whole, due to the differences of opinion that were real, but “not angrily controversial” (Muller, PRRD, III, 136). This corresponds to the Medieval scholasticism, in which the views of Aquinas and Scotus sparred with each other. Aquinas seems to opt for a “rational distinction,” (be it with a foundation in the thing” (Muller, PRRD, III, 136). This distinction seeks to grasp simple essence “imperfectly” by means of the necessarily multiple and diverse conceptions that are peculiar to the human mind. On the other hand, Scotus goes for “a formal non-identity” (rather than “a formal distinction”) that “precedes any intellectual activity” (See for this, Lacoste, ECT, iii, 1475; as well as S. R. Holmes, “Simplicity, Divine,” in Martin Davie, *et. al.* eds, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 840-841), and S. R. Holmes, “Towards a Defense of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity,” in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, Volume 43, Issue 1, January 2001, 137-154). Neither Aquinas nor Scotus wished to see “the doctrine of the attributes to be arbitrary, that is, unconnected to the divine identity, nor to be so distanced from it that it does not serve to reveal God in truth.” Clearly, the plot already thickened in the Middle Ages! But more about this below.

⁵¹³ Versus the unchecked theo-ontological “analytics” of Plantinga and Wolterstorff, who reject incomprehensible complementarity (and mystery) and end up by throwing out simplicity, and versus the more moderate theo-ontological undertakings of Aquinas and Frame who either defend or retain simplicity but seek to make complementarity (and mystery) at least partially intelligible. Once again, since they fail to recognize that complementarity (and mystery) only does and can come to rest in the regenerate heart, all four miss a grand opportunity both evangelistically (1) to share the Gospel as the necessary infrastructure to give the theological enterprise its indispensable footing and (2) emphatically to formulate the mandated ethics as it equally indispensable corollary.

incomprehensibility of simplicity! Not so incidentally, many of the Psalms of David display the same pattern. Again, and again he faces the immanence of God's simplicity, simultaneously in his deserved and withering anger and in his undeserved and merciful love. The prophets underscore this. Holiness and love, with what they entail, seem "mysteriously" to "leapfrog" over each other, at times in the same chapter. Without this simplicity one would have to conclude that God would be irrefutably capricious. His triple holiness, utter purity, excludes this once and for all, by definition!⁵¹⁴

Of course, one may choose to fight this mysterious immanent simplicity-with-distinction. But the immutable God will not change the historical pattern of this mysterious simplicity until its "alternating" (in the biblically descriptive way) or what may to seem to be "leapfrogging" (for lack of a better term from the human perspective) ceases and comes to rest in the unceasing simultaneity of eternal "heavenly" life and eternal "hellish" death! Not so incidentally, it should not escape anyone that and how our Savior Son of God embodied the *sum-total* of the Divine perfections and so put the Divine *simplicity-with-distinctions* on display in a fashion that is unparalleled. He did, does, and undoubtedly will display all of them. Those who did, do, or will observe this with their spiritual eyes did, do, or will marvel and respond simultaneously in utter worshipful silence and utter worshipful eloquence. The tragedy of those who ignore, overlook, deny, resist, or oppose the doctrine of Divine simplicity is that they did, do, will reflect this only in part or miss out on both.

Biblically, to spin on with some more NT data, the *love* of God in Christ welled up, in fact, was damned up (2 Cor. 5:14a) in Paul's regenerate heart (Rom. 9:2; 10:1; 2 Cor. 5:14b, 17) all set to go after sinners (1 Cor. 9:16b) night and day (Acts 20:31a) *and* from door to door (Acts 20:20c-21), sinners who would face the *wrath* of God (2 Cor. 5:11) apart from Christ (2 Cor. 5:20-21). Oh, complementarity of truth in Paul, Prosecuting and Defense Attorney at the same time. Oh, complementarity of truth in God, both "love" and "wrath." Oh, simplicity-with-distinction in God and mirrored in Paul, lodged as it was in his double occupancy heart which governed him as God's image. That is, in the totality of his existence, his thinking (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor 10:5), his willing (Rom. 1:10) his feeling (Rom. 1:11; 9:2a), his holiness (1 Thess. 2:10), his social interaction (1 Thess. 2:7, 11), his creative imagination (Rom. 15:23-28), his speaking (1 Cor. 2:1-5) and his acting (Acts 20:20, 27)! It should not go unnoticed that Paul mirrors God in his love as well as wrath. The same Paul (simplicity) was willing to sacrifice himself in his love for his kinsmen to the point of being accursed, relegated to eternal damnation (Rom. 9:3). At the same time (distinction), he pours the vials of his

⁵¹⁴ I very much doubt whether William of Ockham with his extreme nominalism in which the will of God is the final, if not exclusive determinant of all his actions had even a hunch of the *simplicitas Dei*. This biblical concept applies to his internal functions of thinking, willing and feeling, as well as to his attributes.

wrath upon God's and his opponents (2 Thess. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 4:14-15). Simplicity-with-distinction!⁵¹⁵ Hence no need to be apologetic about this!⁵¹⁶

In sum, all of us would do well to love the Triune and All-Blessed God in and for his simplicity-with-distinction, that is, in and for his awesome Tri-personality as well as in and for the magnificent kaleidoscope of his Perfections. But *orthodoxy* in this area is not sufficient. It must be rooted in *orthopathos* and on display in *orthopraxis*. If this is correct, those who reject simplicity are not even in the ballpark. Those who are merely *orthodox* are undoubtedly in the ballpark. However, without *pathos* they are asleep in the stands. And without *praxis* they may be cheerleaders, but they are not uniformed, nor in the hands-on field of action.⁵¹⁷

Frankly, the Church cannot live and will not survive if it does not take God's "second order" of simplicity, the simplicity of immanence, utterly serious, and fail (refuse?) to mirror this in all its believers and their leaders! Proclaim the Total Triune God of Scripture in the incontestable unity of his Tri-personality and in all his diverse perfections! To proclaim the Father, cover the Old Testament from beginning to end. To proclaim the Son, cover the NT Gospels from beginning to end. To proclaim the Holy Spirit, cover the NT from Acts to the end.⁵¹⁸ Of course, the total Scripture is Trinitarian to the core. But this does not cancel the

⁵¹⁵ In a word, "distinction is not composition." For this component as well as for other components of the doctrine of simplicity, see Turretin, IET, I, 191-194. Not so incidentally, "simplicity-with-distinction" may also on display in the choice of our Lord Jesus, after a night of prayer, of both Peter and Judas to accomplish his purpose. For all practical purposes, Judas, for whom it would have been better never to have been born, went on "to kill him." Peter went on "to be killed for him." This may well be the NT mirror image of God's choice of Saul and David as kings in the OT. God's deserved judgment came down on Saul because of his willful rebellion that ended up in murderous envy and tragic witchcraft. Despite his adultery and murder David became the recipient of God's undeserved mercy, served his generation, and ended up as "a man after God's heart."

⁵¹⁶ In his letters, such as Galatians and Second Corinthians, Paul displays this "simplicity-with-distinction" in a way that is remarkable and should be copied by all disciples of Christ. In his clearly prayerful love, joy, grief, appreciation, dismay, shock, etc., etc., toward his addressees he alternately shares, instructs, enjoins, prohibits, encourages, warns, exhorts, laments, chastises, threatens, excommunicates, etc., etc., and all this in a variety of keys. But it is the same Paul!

⁵¹⁷ For the practical implications of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity, see also Mastricht, TPT, II, 148-152. God is always and unreservedly who he is, in the display of all his attributes, his words and his actions. This teaches us unreservedly to lean on him in all this in total rest, reminds us unreservedly to worship him with all our heart, urges us unreservedly to serve him all of our life, and moves us to unreserved contentment in all conditions and areas of our existence.

⁵¹⁸ We all better listen to Herman Bavinck, RD, II, 320, "Just as in the ontological Trinity the Father is the first in the order of subsistence, the Son the second, the Holy Spirit the third, so also in the history of revelation the Father preceded the Son, and the Son in turn preceded the Holy Spirit. The 'economy' of the Father was especially that of the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1); the 'economy' of the Son started with the incarnation; and the 'economy' of the Holy Spirit began on the Day of Pentecost (John 7:39; 14:16-17). The Father came without having been sent, the Son came after being sent by the Father (Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 3:16; 5:23, 30, 37; 6:28ff; etc.), and the Holy Spirit only came because he was sent both by the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7)." This is robust and authentic Biblical Theology at its finest! As such, he is in excellent company. John Calvin already "adamantly refused the wholesale christologizing of the Old Testament," which "earned" him the "angry" epithet from a Lutheran theologian as *Calvinus judaizans*, judaizing Calvin." Further, when biblical hermeneutics became increasingly "literal, textual, and lingual," and more and more "excluded the allegorical and typological approach," it became progressively "impossible to claim that the goal and direction of each text was Christ." In a word, Christ never does and never may eclipse the text and its message. Biblical Hermeneutics takes the text seriously because it is *God's* Word and identifies its message because it is God's message. Then, readers or listeners, posit the text in Christ, embrace him in faith, and the message will be on hopefully (increasingly) total and uninterrupted display in you as believers. Since the aggregate

fact that some sections are Father-specific, others Son-specific, again others Spirit-specific, and finally others Trinity-specific. So, proclaim the one immutable and indivisible God in the unity of both his Tri-personality and all his diverse perfections. A meticulous simplicity-with-distinction type of hermeneutics that takes a simplicity-with-distinction-Scripture seriously will pave and show the way for a meticulous simplicity-with-distinction type of homiletics to arrive at a 20-20 proclamation and ensuing embrace of the Triune God in the sum-total of his perfections, as revealed in the Word of God, embodied in the Son of God, and envisioned through the Spirit of God. It is and should be a recognized and acknowledged fact that ecclesiastical as well as personal splits are more often, than not caused by a truncated or warped view of God in terms of his trinitarian Being or the kaleidoscope of his perfections. “Be, thou, my undiminished and uninterrupted vision,” therefore, should be the daily heartfelt prayer of all of us. This, in turn, will, should, if not must result in the making believers and their leaders as God’s mirror image. Not just metaphysically, which is a created given (Gen. 2:7b), but also epistemologically and ethically, which are redemptive graces (Eph. 2:24; Col. 3:6).

This brings us last, but not least to the “first order” Divine simplicity. At this point we are facing a problem. Both Mutabilists and Immutabilists recognize that Scripture does not make any *explicitly categorical* statement either about “Temporal Divine Mutability,” whether in whole or in part, or about “Eternal Divine Simplicity.” In each instance an appeal is made by its proponents to “the good and necessary consequence” rule. So, let us look at and unpack what is at stake, step by step.

Yes, there are indubitable “second order” “time strands” in God’s inter-speaking and inter-acting. What else can we expect when God inter-speaks and inter-acts with time-bound creatures? But there is no way that this amounts to temporality in God, either originally so (Wolterstorff), or as an add-on after creation (Oliphint’s original thesis). Supposedly, this is only the case, if not inevitable by “good and necessary consequence.” Similarly, there is indubitably a “second” order simplicity. But does this amount to a “first order” one in which all God’s perfections are necessarily identical? This is also a supposed requirement by “good and necessary consequence” only. However, even among the Reformed orthodox there was no unanimity on this score.⁵¹⁹ All of them were staunchly opposed to any, and all kinds of composition! However, some of them were outright in their emphasis upon absolute *ad intra* attributes-identity in God. At the same time, others, the majority, according to Muller, insisted on some distinctiveness, which either “rested upon” the essence (Aquinas) or was

of texts covers the waterfront of life, the fullness of godly life present in this aggregate will produce life to the full in you through your embrace of or abiding in Christ (John 15:5) in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16c) (See for all this also, Muller, PRRD, II, 213). Bavinck’s “prescription” should especially be taken to heart by those who, however well-intentioned, refer to the OT as the book of Christ, based on the mistaken interpretation of Luke 24:27 and John 5:39. To be sure, Luke 24 informs us that our Lord communicates to his hearers all that pertained to him starting with Moses and all the prophets, while in John 5 he adds that the Scriptures of the OT testify of him. But Luke does not tell us that *all* of Moses, etc., concerned him. Neither does John convey that *all* of the OT Scriptures testify of him. Jesus only quoted the OT and referred to Scripture *to the extent* that they concerned him and testified of him. To claim that the OT is the Book of Christ, ironically misses the fullness of Christ. Since the fullness of Christ is the fullness of the Father (John 1:18; Col. 2:9), to miss the fullness of the Father in the OT is to miss the fullness of Christ in the NT. It is also to miss the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit takes out of Christ, and so discloses what is the fullness of the Father (John 16:14-15), to miss this fullness is to miss the fullness of the Spirit. To honor simplicity-with-distinction in this context is to honor the fullness of God in the fullness of all three Persons, as revealed in Scripture.

⁵¹⁹ See Muller, RD, III, 297. More about this below.

“inherent in” the essence (Scotus) of God. There is also the appearance of a further quirk. Some seem to insist on an absolute attribute-identity to safeguard simplicity. But by seeking to arrive at God by means of the three *viae* they also admit to an *eminenter* distinction in God. All this goes to say that we encounter a dotted landscape.

Further, to hold that there is temporality in God due to “time strands” in his inter-speaking and inter-acting is not even a good, let alone a necessary consequence. At the same time, to hold that all God’s perfections are essentially identical may sound like an attractive consequence, but is it a necessary one? This is not even needed pertaining to “the second order” simplicity which does not portray God as a composite, made up of parts, either in the awesome, explicitly revealed *multi-colored* Rainbow of his perfections, or for that matter in the equally awesome, explicitly disclosed Reality of his *Tri*-Personality.

But apart from all this, the question must be raised whether drawing either conclusion is *permissible* by God and therefore *admissible* in the Church. My counsel is simple. In both instances, leave “essence” alone, leave “essence” alone! Face to face with the transcendent God (Is. 66:1-2a), be humbly child-like and tremble contritely at his word (Is. 66:2b, 5a). This is to say, do not pry into the “secrets” of God to satisfy the mind in innumerable publications, requiring untold loads of time and energy. Rather pursue the revealed “ethics” of God (Is. 66:3-21) as a matter of life and death, an “ethics” that is summarized by Jesus (Mt. 28:19-20) which aims at and ends up with the worship of all regenerated, justified and sanctified humanity (Is. 66:22-23) and the horror of eternal punishment meted out to human as well as angelic rebels as its indescribable counterpart.

Immutabilists, in short, may be applauded that they emphasize and honor *in word and deed* the radical incomprehensible transcendence of God. But should they not abstain from forbidden speculative theo-ontological conclusions of whatever sort? Mutabilists may be applauded to the degree that they stress and respect *in word and deed* the total functional immanence of God. But must they not abstain from forbidden speculative theo-ontology as well? This becomes evident when temporality and mutability, whether in whole or in part ascribed to God.

What is the bottom line? Let both be content to leave mystery ... MYSTERY!⁵²⁰

This may not always be kept in mind by Immutabilists when they make inadmissible logical statements about the incomprehensible essence of God, even if they maintain that these logical statements precisely safeguard this incomprehensible essence.

Neither by Mutabilists, when they ascribe temporality to God as the necessary reason or the conducive condition (sic!) for God to communicate with man (a terrible reason) or as the suggested implication of God’s temporal communication with man (a misguided reason).

However, while the conclusion to Divine temporality, whether in whole or in part, must be resisted and rejected as unnecessary and impermissible, the conclusion of the identity of the Divine attributes can possibly be modified to make it permissible and admissible.

The latter could well be suggested by the Doctrine of the Trinity as an analog. For those who hold to the essential simplicity of the Triune God, this spells by common consent simplicity-with-distinction, intertwining *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*. This clearly establishes beyond a shadow of doubt that the simplicity of God does not by definition rule out distinction *in* God! Further, it is widely agreed upon that the Uncreated One-and-Many Sphere in the Triune God, including the Authority Relationship that is in evidence in this Sphere, is reflected in the created one-and-many spheres, which also includes authority

⁵²⁰ See for all this also the treatment of Divine simplicity in Beeke, RST, I, 624-634.

relationships. In the original/originating reality of the Uncreated “One and Many” as well as in the derivative/imitative reality of the created “one and many” both poles are co-essential. Similarly, in the Original Authority Relationship as well as in the Derivative ones both are co-functional. In a word, the created one and many spheres as well as the created authority relationships are a remarkable and *observable given*. Hence it is permissible and admissible to characterize them as the mirror image of the similarly structured Uncreated Original.

Well, in the light of all this could it be that a similar “state of affairs” obtains in the arena of God’s attributes as we saw in the arena of the Tri-Personal Trinitarian Being of God? The “second order” simplicity is in evidence physically and observably in the whiteness of light that contains all colors of the rainbow. In other words, this clearly spells derivative simplicity-with-distinction. This may warrant the assumption that, just as in the arena of the Trinity there is an economic as well as an essential simplicity-with-distinction, so in the arena of God’s attributes there may be a derivative as well as an original simplicity-with-distinction.⁵²¹ This is not a necessary *conclusion*, not merely because God’s essence is incomprehensible, but mainly because there is no explicit indication in Scripture to this effect. However, it is a reasonable “analogical” *assumption*. In short, while the doctrine of simplicity-with-distinction in the Tri-personal God has the biblical imprimatur and so is a definitive Biblical teaching,⁵²² there *may* be a similar “state of affairs” pertaining to the omni-modal attributes of God.⁵²³

The double decree of Divine election and reprobation in God’s *eternal* plan adds powerful credence to this assumption. Traditionally, and thereby reflecting Scripture, in its child-like Confessions the Reformed Church has invariably ascribed *equal ultimacy* to both components of this decree (simplicity) (Rom. 9:17-24, esp. 22-23; 1 Petr. 2:8; Canons of Dort (1619), I, 6). At the same time, it insisted on the *non-eodem modo* of its implementation (distinction), in which eternal damnation cannot be traced back to the reprobation component in the same way in which eternal salvation is rooted in the election component (Dort, Conclusion). Eternal salvation springs from God’s sovereign grace (Eph. 1:4-6; 2:8). Eternal damnation is due to man’s rebel wickedness (Rev. 14:9-11). Bavinck to his inestimable credit clearly bemoans the fact that “the two (biblical) statements (of divine sovereignty and human responsibility) that stand side by side unreconciled” have tempted “theology consistently to try in various ways to harmonize them.”⁵²⁴ Such harmonization transcends the pay-scale of the human mind, whether theological or otherwise.

At any rate, even in the face of mystery and fully content to call attributable simplicity-with-distinction an eminently reasonable assumption, the Church will not “confessionally” pin this down, and therefore, cannot produce a rift in its United Front. In fact, historically it has wholeheartedly, and thankfully, confessed that “the only living and true God is ... without parts” (Westminster Confession of Faith, II, 1). But it has never detailed its possible *essential* entailments. Hence it never resulted in a rift-producing wrangling about issues in

⁵²¹ This may well run parallel with Augustine’s “multiform uniformity (simplicity)” and “uniform (simple) multiformity” and with the contention of Goris that Zanchi posits a “natural order” (*ordo naturalis*) of perfections in God’s essence that would render Aquinas’ simplicity doctrine “theologically idle and inoperative.” If in their “formulations” both Augustine and Zanchi would, indeed, aim at the archetypal order of the attributes in God’s essence, they would part company with those who would hold to their “absolute identity” in this essence.

⁵²² See for this also, Muller, PRRD, IV, 196-244, esp. 196-214.

⁵²³ Muller, PRRD, III,

⁵²⁴ Bavinck, RD, II, 353.

which Scripture is silent.⁵²⁵ This godly restraint, which allows for different assessments, similar to the different assessments about the place of the fall in the Supralapsarian-Infralapsarian debate, simply reflected the historical situation. There apparently is no indication that the Reformers tackled this issue. Praise God for their refusal to do so. But the post-Reformation orthodoxy that did cover it at length was not able to come to a consensus.⁵²⁶ But all this did not compromise to the slightest degree their unswerving commitment to own, honor and disseminate the biblical truths of Divine Immutability and Divine Simplicity. The Reformers as well as post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy were stalwarts in this regard.

But many of them made it a point as well to spell out the implications of these truths for practical godliness. They were bound and determined to show and insist that the so-called “theoretical” exposition must stand shoulder to shoulder, march arm in arm, and act hand in hand with the “practical” application. Anyone who wishes to avoid “pure theology” is and should be highly interested in the net and tangible effect of any biblical doctrine, including the ones under our present consideration.⁵²⁷ This is behind the insistence of Reformed orthodoxy for theology to be “theoretical-practical!” Candidly however, the actual, explicit identification of the “practical,” which is programmatic in some, such as in Mastricht, and more occasional in others, such as in Bavinck, is all too often non-existent in most Reformed authors, including the “iconic ones.” In them preoccupation with the “theoretical,” necessary as it is, all too frequently preempted the concrete spelling out of the “practical.”⁵²⁸

But be this what it may, it seems to me as well that all the practical “directives” that are stipulated, not only in Reformed orthodoxy, have a fundamental shortcoming that undoubtedly came back to haunt the Church. However grateful we may and must be for the emphasized necessity, the pointed specificity, the at times rich content, and, doubtlessly, the sanctifying absorption by the believer of the carefully articulated applicatory implications of cogently argued and clearly stated biblical truths, they are essentially one-dimensional. It is one thing to equip an army to the hilt! But without a continuing and dogged recruitment of new soldiers, “the end” does not for long stay beyond the horizon but is sooner or later a

⁵²⁵ The same has been in evidence in other areas of theology. Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians, despite their differences, have always kept the ecclesiastical peace. So, have traducianists and creationists regarding the origin of the individual soul, and those who held to either the covenantal or realistic participation of mankind in Adam’s sin. 1 Tim. 1:4-5 and 1 Tim. 6:4-5 and their warnings against “speculation,” “fruitless discussions,” “morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words,” as well as “constant friction” may well have had something to do with this.

⁵²⁶ For the lack of agreement between Supra- and Infra-lapsarians as well as the “live and let-live” attitude toward each other, see Bavinck, RD, II, 354-355, 382-392. Incidentally, in the light of “the inadequacy” of both views “gracious” mutual toleration must have been, in fact, was a “god-sent” of grace. For a similar *non-polemic* (italics, mine) lack of consensus regarding the “first order” simplicity of the Divine attributes among the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox, see Muller, PRRD, III, 135-136.

⁵²⁷ Let us listen once again to Mastricht, II, 148-152, as he elaborates on the practical implications of Divine Simplicity. To him, this Doctrine “discloses the foundation of every perfection in God and every imperfection in his creatures. It teaches us to lean in simple rest and confidence upon God alone. It teaches us to attend to Divine worship with a simple heart. It urges sincerity in our manner of life. It moves us to study contentment. Beeke, RST, 635, adds to this that the Divine simplicity that comes to expression in God as Light (1 John 1:5-5) and God as Love (1 John 4:7-8) obliges us to “walk in light” and “walk in love!”

⁵²⁸ Turretin, IET, I, 20-22, champions the theoretical-practical nature of theology, similar to “the branch of medicine” that aspires to obtain “knowledge” to arrive at “the cure of diseases,” all with reference to Is. 11:2; 53:11; Jer. 31:34; John 13:17; 17:3; 1 Co. 13:; Tit. 1:1; 2:12; 1 John 2:; 3, 4, 5. But unlike Mastricht he rarely, if at all appends a “practical part” to his otherwise excellent and thorough, if not near-exhaustive exposition of the truths of Scripture.

present and grim reality. Here is the point. I have not encountered and am not aware of any “practicals” that even mention the dire need of “making disciples,” let alone bind it on the hearts of the readers and hammer it home.” Even if the inevitable “end” is “out of sight” and therefore (conveniently?) “out of mind” to most, it is a very 20-20 visible reality to godly visionaries who are often vexed about the “short-sightedness” of their fellow resident-alien travelers. This vexation is at times aggravated, when “shortsightedness” decries, belittles, or even mocks and denounces their vision. Such “decial” is passing strange.

Yes, our Commander-in-Chief, to bring glory to his and our Father, wants, if not insists upon a to-the-hilt equipped Army! By all possible means, teach all soldiers, none excepted, to observe *whatever* he commands. “Be holy, as my and our Father is holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). In fact, “be perfect, as he is perfect” (Mt. 5:48)! But the recruitment of new soldiers is just as emphatically stipulated as their equipment. “Make disciples of *all* nations (Mt. 28:19).” You have this your duty and this your life cut out for you! Suffer and die to get it done! Humanly speaking, by the hook or the crook of the grace of Almighty God! It is painfully remarkable that none of this is even on the horizon of the at times elaborate *practica*.⁵²⁹ Often amazing content? Absolutely! Frequently a feast? Just as much! But curtailed, nevertheless. All biblical truth does and must open a portal upon Christ’s, not single, not even double, but Triple Grand Command. Divine Immutability and Simplicity, as we shall see, not in the last place.

It is the Immutable God in his being and his plan who is determined to arrive at the Grand Finale, described in Revelation 21 and 22. He knows exactly what he is doing. He drowns all mankind in the Flood to display his sovereign immutable justice. But he opens a wormhole into the future to show that the eventual arrival in the Grand Finale is sovereign immutable grace. He enlarges on both in the exile *and* the post-exilic return of his own people. Their exile is deserved and just, and the return to their homestead is for the glory of his name and to the praise of his grace (Ezek. 36:22). 70 AD underscores all this as starkly and gloriously as is creaturely possible. The utter destruction of Jerusalem puts the unambiguous reality of immutable justice permanently on the map of history. The glorious proliferation of the Church is indicative of his immutable grace. The Judgment puts both in final perspective. Immutable justice is meted out in eternal damnation for which there is no recourse. Immutable grace is the occasion for eternal worship. However, the twofold strand of God’s immutable being and immutable plan find their completion in a third component, to make it unbreakable (Eccl. 4:12b). This is his immutable word, which is admittedly a complex reality. It includes immutable promises and immutable threats, but also immutable injunctions and immutable prohibitions. Towering above everything following the cross and resurrection of our Commander-in-Chief and the Baptism of the Spirit is the immutable Triple Command as “the only thing needful” for all Church folks to pursue with literally “all they’ve got!” “Recruit soldiers (disciples).” “Once and for all publicly identify them as such (Baptism).” “Equip them to the hilt for the purpose to enter the battle.”

Refusal to be fully, if not perfectly equipped meets with immutable justice if our Commander’s ecclesiastical assessment of Revelation 2 and 3 mean anything. Refusal to enter the battle is equally dangerous. It is to defy our Commander who tells us immutably to suffer and die in seeking to enroll new recruits to be equipped as battle-hardened soldiers in his Army. This is more than implied by Paul’s injunction to Church members to be his

⁵²⁹ Unless I am mistaken, this is regrettably absent in Mastricht’s otherwise impressive volumes in which the treatment of every doctrine culminates in a “practical crowning piece.”

followers and imitators, as he follows and imitates his Commander (1 Cor. 10:32-11:1) and issues a “woe” to himself and others who overlook, ignore, refuse or resist it. There is plenty of evidence in the early Church of spontaneous and effective compliance to his uncompromising injunction, not in the last place in the planting of churches by Paul’s spiritual offspring (1 Thess. 1:6-8; see also Acts 8:4-5; 11:19-21; Col. 4:15-16). Merely to equip an Army in the armistice (that is, in the church building) is to teach it to march on the spot. The net effect will be small, if not negligible!

Frankly, in all this Divine Immutability more than doubles down on the underlying and more fundamental Divine Simplicity that encompasses the unity of God and his distinctive Tri-personality as well as the perfection of God and his distinctive multi-colored attributes. It is the one God (simplicity) who as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (distinction), and the perfect God (simplicity) who in the sum-total of his astoundingly colorful attributes (distinction) launched his universe-wide enterprise *with and in* time and space with an exceedingly specific objective. This is for him to display in the Judgment, the capstone of the first major phase of the history of the universe, the awesome glory of his Tri-personal Being, inclusive of all his “activities” as well as the sum-total of his perfections, inclusive of all its facets, all this as the precursor for the second phase of the history of the universe. That is, exposed to God’s glory in its fullness as much as this is creaturely possible, either to glorify him as a recipient of his sheer grace by enjoying him ⁵³⁰forever in perfection throughout eternity or to glorify him as an object of his justice by suffering a fully deserved punishment equally for all eternity (Mt. 25:46).

However, to arrive at the display of the Glory of God’s Self-disclosure in the Judgment, all the components of the universe and its history, the creation *ex nihilo*, mankind’s fall into sin, as well as the saving activities of the Triune God are indispensably necessary. Together they constitute a united, if not seamless tapestry, with distinctions and all, to set the stage for the grand demonstration of the sum-total of God’s manifold perfections (Rom. 9:22). But it may never be overlooked, ignored, rejected, or opposed that the simplicity of God’s eternal sovereign plan, with distinctions and all, also entails all the components of his temporal government to arrive at the Judgment as the final roadside station to a twofold unending future.

Here also, it is “all or nothing.” The “all” is on astounding display in the immutable promise of the Father, the inestimable production of the Son, and the invincible transportation of the Holy Spirit reaching their zenith in the New Covenant. In some fleeting instances it seemed that the “nothing” prevailed, such as, in the Flood, the Exile, and the 70AD Destruction of Jerusalem. But as a threefold display of his fully deserved justice they proved to be an essential part of the “all” without damaging, in fact, underscoring the kaleidoscope of distinctions in the multi-colored rainbow of all Divine attributes. Once again, the “wormhole” in the flood scenario (one family, that of Noah), the improbable return from the Exile, the escapees by the skin of their teeth from Jerusalem’s destruction, figured prominently as the “ways and means” of God’s grace as well as many other of his attributes, such as his love, power, wisdom, etc., etc., which were designed to pave the way to an astounding future!

However, the “all” of God also includes the strategy of the Triple Command on the part our Commander in Chief to be implemented by the Church. The embrace of Divine simplicity-with-

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⁵³⁰ For the way Reformed orthodoxy understood and set forth the Glory of God, it is worthwhile to consult Muller, PRRD, III, 543-551.

distinction manifests itself when the Church acts as “one” in the diversity of its threefold ministry of daily proclamation of the Gospel evangelism, daily proclamation of the Word in teaching and exhorting, and a daily sharing, caring and showing mercy, all under the leadership of evangelists, pastor-teachers and deacons both internally in the assemblies and in the families and externally as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16).

Still, the Church is not able, or even allowed to function in this multi-faceted capacity unless it also reflects as much as is creaturely possible the simplicity-with-distinctions that is in evidence in the perfections of God. Its existence is threatened with termination when the admirable pursuit of holiness of life and doctrine is not matched by fervent love (Rev. 2:1-8). It is threatened with judgment when mutual love, service, unswerving perseverance under the onslaught of the Enemy, even unto death, are not matched with intolerance of any who play footloose with sexual immorality and idolatry (Rev. 2:12-17; 18-29). It is threatened with a death-certificate when reputation, however glorious, is not matched with reality (Rev. 3:1-8). It is threatened with extinction when a proud and ingrown sense of “having arrived” is not replaced by a fellowship with and an abiding in Christ as a total Savior unto regeneration, justification, *and* sanctification with the specific and uncompromising objective to bring forth fruit to the glory of the Father (Rev. 3:14-21; John 15:5-8). In short, the embrace of God in his simplicity-with-distinction, whether in his Tri-personality or omni-modal attributes, recognizes that it is “all or nothing.” Further, when the “all” is not present, it comes down to “whatever repentance” is needed to pursue the “all.” The “all” is in evidence when a Church is giving its “all” in suffering and death (Rev. 2:8-11) or surrenders itself in the totality of its life to the total Word of God (Rev. 3:7-13).

If the “all” is missing, “the end” may not come immediately. But come it will! In fact, the “first” judgment will always target a “deficient” Church, even before it hits a rebellious world (1 Pet. 4:17a). Frankly, God is (often) long-suffering vis-à-vis the world (1 Pet. 4:17b). But our Commander-in-Chief cannot stand his Army when it is AWOL in its “essential make-up” or in its “mandated activity.” However, when it commits its “all” whether in death (Rev. 2:10c) or in life in both these aspects or areas, it can expect much fruitfulness. An eager commitment to and embrace of suffering and death (Phil. 3:8) produce fruit, in fact, much fruit (John 12:24). So does an eager commitment and surrender in “life” (Rev. 3:8-9).

Once this double simplicity with distinctions grabs the heart of God’s people, they will turn to prayer. “Send me and equip me where necessary either to suffer and die physically or to suffer and die spiritually for my Commander in Chief as my Model and Wellspring (John 15:5; Phil. 3:10) in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and to the glory of the Father (John 15:8).”

Beyond this I hope and pray that all Seminaries, Bible Colleges, Pulpits, Group Bible Studies, Family devotions, lectures, messages, or presentations portray a zeal to be a mirror of the double Divine simplicity-with-distinctions, in the face of the Tri-personal and omni-modal perfect glory of God and are governed by the presence of their practical implications.

After all, “the only thing needful” is to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them to observe whatever God commands to make disciples in ever upward spiraling movement. Grasping God’s double simplicity-with-distinction is to grasp this. And grasping this is to grasp God’s double simplicity-with-distinction. When the Church spirals downward, it has lost, or is losing sight of the fullness of the Triune omni-perfect God. Sooner or later “Ichabod” will appear to be the silent but eloquent handwriting on the wall. Only “the blind” would stand in need of the verbalization of its interpretation until its message is crystal clear. Hopefully, it will not be too late!

The bottom line is simple in its essence as well as profound in its diversity. Let all of us intone like clockwork. “Everything I think or say in my indispensable and heartfelt pursuit of exegetical theology, systematic theology, biblical theology, ethical theology, apologetic theology, or practical theology, does and must take aim to serve Christ’s Triple Command. Furthermore, I stand ready to model how to make disciples, to baptize them and to teach them, and then to observe you when you are and should be ready to imitate me in all three areas of ministry until we together can conclude that you are capable to do both as a certified soldier in God’s army.” It would revolutionize Schools, Churches as well as Homes. I cannot believe that there would be anyone who would not respond to this with a hearty, much needed, and hopefully repentant “AMEN!”

All in all, at this point I am not *telling* the Bible believing “Classic” Immutabilists or the more recent Mutabilists that they are wrongheaded, regardless my views in the matter under discussion. These views are clear. Without “ontological simplicity” there could not possibly be *Tri*-unity. Only a *Tri*-theism, which Scripture did not, does and will *not* tolerate! It is *Mono*-theistic to its very core. To defy this is to loathe God, rather than to fear him, and to meet him as a “consuming fire” (Hebr. 12:28-29; see also Hebr. 10:31). But “attributes” simplicity that spells essential “synonymous” identity? If anything, or at best, we can surmise that they are one, as intrinsically “essential,” as well as distinct and *perichoretic*, resembling the way the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are related to each other.⁵³¹ This would most likely reflect Augustine’s assessment about “multiform uniformity” and “uniform multiformity” in God! If so, the “first order” simplicity would provide the foundation and the transcendental condition for “the second order” and be reflected in it. But no one really knows since it is not revealed in Scripture. It might even be a “good” consequence. But a necessary one? And even more telling, a *permissible* and *admissible* one? And possibly to top this, a consequence that should split churches and ministries when set in ever-hardening concrete? Furthermore, ascribing temporality to God, especially a necessary temporality to make it possible for him to inter-speak and inter-act? It seems preposterous to me to come to such conclusion. “A good and necessary consequence?” By no means! A *permissible* and *admissible* consequence? More than doubtful, to say the least!

At any rate, to berate brothers or sisters in the faith and so to create a personal or collaboration rift would be a bad, an unnecessary, an impermissible and an inadmissible consequence. It also would misdirect the focus of this volume and undermine its purpose. I am simply and prayerfully suggesting that all of us stick to the mysterious complementary of truth and *don’t even seek* to draw conclusions that are not permissible or admissible. When in addition I ask for all of us to examine ourselves whether “the only thing needful” is truly the Grand Obsession and the Hot Pursuit of Christ’s Triple Marching order, in word and in

⁵³¹ It is interesting to note that for Aquinas “a distinction between attributes” differs from “a distinction between relations.” “Attributes, such as power and goodness, do not result in any conceptual opposition and therefore cannot be distinct *secundum rem*—but relational distinctions, namely Ungenerate (paternity) and Generate (filiation), do stand in conceptual opposition and are therefore to be understood as distinct: since the relations are in God *realiter* and are in relative (but not essential or substantial) opposition to one another, there is a real distinction in God.” For this, see Muller, PRRD, II, 48-49. In other words, all this demands the conclusion that in the “essence” of God there is *necessarily* an “identity (One God) with distinctions (Three Persons).” But this does *not necessarily* transfer to and obtain in the case of God’s attributes. In other words, there is no compelling reason to conclude that also in this instance there is an “identity with distinctions.” Be this as it may, just as such supposition (in all humility) cannot be discounted, it certainly can be correct. In fact, the identity in a beam of light (its whiteness) in conjunction with its distinctions (all the colors of a rainbow), could well creaturely mirror this.

deed, I am afraid that here I hit “pay-dirt” in myself as well as in many others. We live in a Culture in which both Personal Gospel-Evangelism and Personal Word-Teaching is at an unacceptable (historic?) low. If this volume would produce heartfelt repentance and the display of deeds worthy of repentance (Mt. 3:8), it has met its intended objective by the Grace of God.

A recent analytic philosopher is of the opinion that his branch of philosophy should slow down in its pursuit of apologetic epistemology, “whether one is justified, warranted, entitled, or whatever, in believing in God” in the face of the problem of evil and the silence of God. Instead, it should focus on “the role of religion in life and society” in the face of so many “unresolved issues.”⁵³² Well, if he is serious, James would be an excellent guide. The combination of his life and his letter “embody” obedience to Christ’s Triple Command. Any other “religion” he declares “delusional” and “worthless” (Jam. 1:26). But this still leaves one question unanswered. How should the Church go about “sanitizing” itself, that is, both its leadership and its membership, of any of its presently unmistakable shortcomings and return to the Holy Spirit “spontaneity” on such telling display in the Book of Acts? This does and will require several phases. These will now be identified, be it in short order.

The first phase is to ensure that leaders and members qualify as Christians, that is have experienced the starting point, repentance, the centerpiece, forgiveness of sins, and the crowning piece, the gift of the Holy Spirit, of authentic Biblical salvation (Acts 2:38). Without the starting point of regeneration, a heart transplant, evidenced in repentance and faith, there is no spiritual life whatsoever, just as there is no physical life without the first birth. This reflects the Chinese saying that “everything must have a beginning.” The failure to give regeneration equal billing with justification and sanctification clearly ignores this. When Whitefield sought to fill this vacuum, he was often opposed by the ecclesiastical bureaucrats who espoused baptismal regeneration, presumptive regeneration, or judgment-of-charity regeneration. Thus, they sought to implement an imaginary continuation (justification and sanctification) without a beginning.

To be sure, without the centerpiece of justification there is no peace with God, just as there is no cessation of war without a peace treaty. The present-day attack by a variety of scholars upon the imputation of Christ’s righteousness which is central to this doctrine results in the travesty to put up buildings (sanctification) in a warzone. Similarly, without the crowning piece of Spirit-produced holiness there is no empowered fellowship with God. But without a heart transplant in regeneration neither justification nor sanctification are even on the horizon. The hyper-grace movement that puts all its eggs in the basket of justification does not only ignore the beginning but can never produce a fully equipped *militia Dei* that effectively marches against and conquers “the gates of hell” (Mt. 16:18). Similarly, any movement that pursues sanctification to the hilt, but in a legalistic fashion, that is without a proper starting point or centerpiece is an easy prey for those same “gates.” If, and when asked by God in the Judgment, “Why would I let you in my Presence for all eternity?” only one proper threefold reply will do. “I have the perfect heart of Jesus, the perfect righteousness of Jesus, and the perfect holiness of Jesus. I fell woefully short, in fact, was radically and totally bankrupt in each of these three areas. Convicted by the Holy Spirit of my threefold “woe,” I put in my application with him for all three remedies, and he graciously answered my cry.”

⁵³² Wolterstorff, IG, 32-33.

The second phase starts with a bootcamp. In it all Spirit-filled participants are to be “armed” with God’s vision for his Church, the body of Christ, and the *militia* of the Spirit, blueprinted by our Commander-in-Chief when he commanded his forces to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them whatever his Father enjoined them to do. He accompanied this with the promise that as long as they were in the field of action they could be assured of his presence, his protection, and a plentiful harvest. Subsequently, every “soldier” must receive a short Manual in each of three areas of the triad. These must be taught and studied, until it is absorbed and owned.

The third phase adds “field work” to “classroom instruction.” As a rule of thumb the three activities of sharing the Gospel in the making of disciples, sharing the Word in teaching them to observe what God commands, and serving in the widest sense of the term ought to be modeled by the instructor-mentor. This may take five times or more to familiarize the “students” with it. The sequel is to observe the students as they put what they have learned and were shown, into hands-on practice. This may take five or more times as well, until they are comfortable doing it. One ideal practice setting is the family. Parents must learn to evangelize, share teach, and serve their children anyway. Other venues may be presentations in the homes of Church visitors, friends, and neighbors who are willing to be visited. For practice in a variety of services, there should be enough occasions or even organizations where a helping heart and hand are welcome. The capstone is to declare them fully equipped.

The fourth phase is to determine the giftedness of each member of the *militia Dei*. This giftedness is either in the area of “evangelism” (Mt. 4:19), or in the area of “speaking the utterances of God” (1 Pet. 4:11a), or in the area of “service” (1 Pet. 4:11b). The latter two are also mentioned by Paul and designates them as “prophecy” (Rom. 12:6b) and “service” (Rom. 12:7a). He, then, subdivides the abstract noun “prophecy” in two concretes, “he who teaches” (Rom. 12:7b) and “he who exhorts” (Rom. 12:8a), and the abstract noun, “service” in three concretes, “he who shares” (Rom. 12:8b), “he who cares (Rom. 12:8c), and “he who shows mercy (Rom. 12:8d).⁵³³ Candidly, one can hardly learn how to swim without entering the pool. But when upon receiving one’s swimming “diploma” (certification in all three areas), and the pool is sufficiently frequented (obedience in all three areas becomes a habit), sooner or later one’s specialty (giftedness) will emerge. This “emergence” should be pursued withal possible vigor since giftedness makes God’s people “unstoppable” in their obedience to Christ’s threefold mandate in the special area of their Spirit-given niche. So, the presence of giftedness can never be overvalued. It is a pivotal necessity for the Church to function maximally. First, gifted *militia* men who qualify are eligible for leadership according to their giftedness in the office of evangelist, pastor-teacher, or deacon, and would be waiting in the wings to take over upon the retirement or resignation of their leaders. Second, and vice versa, leaders can use the gifted members in the body of Christ, just as captains use lieutenants, in a twofold way. They can be their vanguard (green berets) in the three mandated areas, and, in the process, help equip all the members of the *militia* in the field.

The fifth phase is to arrive at an effective United Front in which the Church seeks above all to maximize the pursuit of Christ’s Triple Command. In very short order, to do so it should seek ordain and install Spirit-filled evangelists (Eph. 4:11c) to take the lead “on the outside” in making disciples by proclaiming the New Covenant Gospel and Spirit-filled pastor-teachers “on the inside” to proclaim the Word from Genesis to Revelation, with

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⁵³³ For the same interpretation, see J. van Bruggen, *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1984), 150-153.

Spirit-filled deacons as the ecclesiastical Quartermasters to supply both Leadership and Membership with the “physical logistics and wherewithal” to implement Christ’s vision in obedience to his Triple Command. But this is only a starting point. Once in place, evangelists face the clearly arduous task to equip all Church members to share the Gospel, pastors-teachers (Eph. 4:11d) to equip all Church members to share the Word, and deacons (Phil. 1:1) to equip all Church members to share themselves in a life of service, targeting in all three areas, first their families as a possible training ground and then onward into the world.

The equipping process would call for 1/3 of the time “in a classroom” setting with the assistance of the three small Syllabi to be taught, studied, and absorbed. The remaining 2/3 of the process should take place “in the field” for the leaders to model their respective ministries and subsequently to observe their “trainees” to follow in their footsteps until they are fully prepared (Eph. 4:12). Of course, this takes commitment, concentration, time, and energy. But it simply reflects Christ’s truth that no seed can ever hope to produce fruit, until it dies first (John 12:34). Once the Church turns into an equipped and disciplined Army-on-the-Move (Mt. 28:19-20), our Commander in Chief (Mt. 28:18) will show his presence by providing it with all necessary logistics and gracing it by turning sinners into saints and thereby co-soldiers.

The sixth phase, in fact, capstone outcome will be Church-on-the-Move by the grace and to the glory of God! Based upon and set in motion by the “first order” simplicity-with-distinctions, both Tri-personal and Omni-Attributal, it will come into its own as a “second order” simplicity-with-distinctions, a totally united Leadership and Membership, standing shoulder to shoulder, marching arm in arm, and acting hand in hand, in the Church’s fully integrated many-colored, multi-faceted, and multi-purpose ministry. In short, the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity-with-distinctions cannot be overlooked, ignored, opposed, or rejected without grave consequences. It will not only damage a full-orbed worship of the Triune God in his essence (*ad intra*) and his operations (*ad extra*). It will equally damage its ecclesiastical counterpart in its essence and ministry. I pray for a complete consensus that this is too high a price to pay. All those who are both “grabbed” and “gripped” by the Immutability of God’s Triune Being, his Sovereign Plan, and its Detailed Mapped-out Execution with a view to the Grand Demonstration of his Glory and his Perfections will undoubtedly be “sold” on the “second order” simplicity-with-distinctions Ministry and eagerly seek to be an essential part of it without reservation or retreat, eyeing the triple “price” (1 Cor. 9:25) of “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8), the vision of God’s Glory (Rev. 21:22), and eternal worshipful service (Rev. 7:15).

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Spotlight XII

The Continuity-Discontinuity Issue

Before I turn to my Postscript a concluding word about Richard Muller’s monumental four volumes on Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics! More than likely his remarkable “output” will never be matched. It is the work of a lifetime and a veritable treasure chest of information that covers the waterfront of Medieval scholastic theology from the 13th to the 15th century, of Reformation theology in the 16th century, and of post-Reformation scholastic theology in the 17th and 18th century. As I understand it, Muller’s main focus throughout is to research and determine the degree of continuity and discontinuity between the Medieval scholastics, on the one

hand, and the Reformers on the other, as well as the degree of continuity and discontinuity between the Reformers, on the one hand, and post-Reformation orthodoxy, on the other, and in its wake the degree of continuity and discontinuity of the Medieval scholastics, on the one hand, and post-Reformation orthodox scholasticism, on the other. He launched upon this research because of his conviction that scholarship by and large had overlooked or ignored the continuity-discontinuity issue, which had to be remedied to get a proper and appropriate overview of the theological landscape between the 13th and 18th century.⁵³⁴

To start with, Muller successfully pointed out that a distinction must be made between content scholasticism and method scholasticism. His thesis is that both the Reformation and post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics were not averse to the use of method scholasticism and increasingly adopted it. He demonstrated that as such Thomas Aquinas did cast a huge and legitimate shadow especially upon Post-Reformation Dogmatics. All this led to the thesis that the continuity between Aquinas' scholasticism and the Reformers on the one hand, and between the Reformers and Post Reformation Dogmatics, on the other hand, was much more pronounced than the discontinuity. To be sure content-wise there was a gap between Medieval scholasticism and the Reformers, which was perpetuated in Post-Reformation scholasticism. However, methodologically the continuity outdistanced the discontinuity. The sheer avalanche of information that is presented in Muller's influential volumes as well as in a variety of other publications have convinced most, if not all of today's scholarship of the correctness of the "continuity" assessment as outdistancing "discontinuity" by a wide (?) margin. As a result, Aquinas has gained in stature (if not re-gained stature?) in Reformed circles. A re-assessment of Calvin's thinking undoubtedly contributed to this. It was argued that his aversion to medieval scholasticism was focused upon and restricted to the content type which was espoused in his day in the Sorbonne in Paris. Hence, it was limited in scope and could quite well go hand in hand with the fruitful use of Aristotelian "logic and rhetoric" that was adopted by Thomist scholasticism. In fact, this "tandem" was not at all objectionable to Calvin and eventually found its way into scholastic post-Reformation orthodoxy.

However, in my admittedly much more limited research I (still) had to conclude (repeatedly) that Aquinas was influenced by an Platonian/Aristotelian/Plotinian type of philosophy that through Dionysius and others entered into his thinking and ended up as much more than "just" a "handmaiden." It determined the very nature of his theologizing. If this conclusion is correct, the discontinuity between Aquinas's scholasticism and Calvin was greater than was let on, which translates into an equally greater discontinuity between Calvin and the post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy that admittedly drank deeply out of the well of Aquinas. In short, there was a dimension to the Medieval legacy, snapped up by the post-Calvinian orthodoxy, the *essence* of which seemed to (may well?) have escaped Muller. If this is correct, it is most likely due to the fact he never investigated the roots and nature of Aquinas' philosophical "handmaiden." To be sure, we encounter terms, such as, Aristotelianism, Platonism, Plotinianism, Neoplatonism, etc. But these philosophical edifices were never analyzed in their motivation, essence, and objective, let alone as "empty deceptions." Of course, one cannot necessarily expect this from someone who covers a specific time-period in and a specific area of Christian Dogma from a historical perspective, however laudable the effort, astute the research and impressive the outcome. But it leaves a vacuum that must be filled and therefore comes with a price. Muller's volumes did not pinpoint why a kind or strand of theologizing which post-Reformation orthodoxy inherited from Medieval scholasticism is not found in Calvin, such as, "the embrace of natural theology," the "archetypal-ectypal distinction," and "the use of the three *viae*!" Frankly, this was royally admitted, in fact, *could* be "cheerfully" admitted by Muller due to the reason that he gives for its absence in Calvin, if not the rationale that he attaches to this absence. But does this reason or rationale hold water?

According to Muller, there is undoubtedly *no* trace of "natural theology" in Calvin, in fact, not even an argument for it. None whatsoever!⁵³⁵ Neither is there any mention of "the archetypal-ectypal" distinction. This

⁵³⁴ Muller, PRRD, I, 27-46.

⁵³⁵ Muller, PRRD, I, 271-272, "Calvin, Bullinger, Vermigli, and Musculus all discuss the naturally available 'knowledge of God,' but they nowhere construct a 'natural theology' and nowhere discuss either the advisability or inadvisability of constructing one. Calvin and Viret proposed a twofold knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, while Musculus addresses the issue of natural and revealed knowledge with a threefold distinction of the subject, into the general revelation of in nature, the special revelation in Scripture, and the gracious witness of the Spirit that renders Scripture authoritative. Bullinger, like Calvin, appears to have distinguished between the reception of natural revelation by pagans or unbelievers and the reception of natural revelation by way of the testimony of Scripture." Apparently not a hint of a so-called natural theology on the part of the regenerate apart from *revealed* Scripture. Frankly, this does not comport with Muller's later statement that Calvin does not deny that there is or can be a genuine

language has certainly “medieval resonances,” but “little background in the era of the Reformation.” Candidly, Calvin’s conviction either that “human beings cannot enter the ultimate mind and will of God to discern its content but must trust in what has been revealed and must gain assurance from the revelation in Christ and from his work in the hearts and minds of God’s people” or that “revelation given in finite and understandable form rest on the eternal truth of God” can hardly be construed as establishing parallels to the archetypal-ectypal distinction (versus Muller). The Reformation identifies the place and function of “eternal truth,” honors it as God’s “secret,” and leaves it alone. The archetypal-ectypal distinction makes this “eternal truth” its point of departure and seeks to make it intelligible.⁵³⁶ This is admittedly not in the purview of Calvin. Neither, for that matter, is there in him a trace of “the three *viae*!”⁵³⁷

However, this does not (seem to) bother Muller in the least. According to him, either Calvin paved the way for these themes to be “fruitfully” developed. Or, with the help of Medieval scholasticism, they grew practically and rather spontaneously out of what is already found in Calvin in a latent, if not elemental, or rudimentary fashion.⁵³⁸ So, Muller can and does conclude to a basically seamless “maturation” process that to the praise of post-Reformation thinkers reached its zenith in their *scholastically* codified theology and so found its way on the map of Church (and World) History. It also institutionalized the Reformation Church to make it a societal entity, if not historical power to be reckoned with. Thereby and despite several distinctive, if not unique features in post-Reformation orthodoxy, “No Radical Discontinuity!” In fact, this orthodoxy managed to trump an essential discontinuity with “the Church of All Ages” in general, and with “the Reformation” in particular!

It is undeniable that Muller, backed by his unmatched research, brought about a near-wholesale change in assessment of and thereby attitude toward Medieval scholasticism. This led to a virtual applause of the unmistakable inroads it made in post-Reformation orthodoxy, and even was made to feel welcome as a worthy contributor up to and including much of present-day Reformed thinking, inclusive of the area of apologetics.⁵³⁹ What to think about all this? Well, from my perspective the so-called “seamless maturation” in each of the three instances mentioned is simply assumed and taken for granted, and in none of them is really argued (at length) as actually being the case. So, let us take a closer look at each of them.

First, the attestation of a “natural theology” in Calvin is, indeed, impressive.⁵⁴⁰ But it is far from unanimous. One scholar makes a strong and even more impressive case, if not establishes once and for all that Calvin does indeed insist on a natural *knowledge* of God but by no means allow for a natural *theology*.⁵⁴¹ It is

natural theology based on natural revelation,” even if he explains this in an addition, “rather his intention is to declare that no natural theology contributes to salvation.” The best way to enter in and to find our way through Calvin’s thinking is to deny that Calvin posits a “natural theology” on the part of the believer that is independent from Holy Writ. But there is a “natural theology” on the part of the unbeliever who interprets the natural knowledge derived from natural revelation. But such theology is invariably and, by definition, a suppression of the truth. Hence it cannot contribute to salvation in any way, shape, or form! At any rate, (with Muller) “it was only post-Reformation orthodoxy that “admitted natural theology in the ‘encyclopedia’ of theological studies.” But even at that, “differences did arise among the Reformed orthodox concerning the purpose and the relationship to the other forms of theological discourse.” In short, in contrast to natural revelation and natural knowledge, “natural theology” is not even on the horizon of the early Reformers. Further, it stands to eminent reason that “differences” arise in the expounding of a doctrine that is not found in Scripture and may well go against its grain! See for further details on Calvin, Muller, PRRD, I, 273-278, and on post-Reformation orthodoxy, PRRD, I, 278-288.

⁵³⁶ For all this, see Muller, PRRD, I, 229.

⁵³⁷ In none of Muller’s four volumes, PRRD, I, II, III, IV, did I encounter any mention of the three *viae* in connection with John Calvin. For the *via causalitatis*, see Muller, PRRD, III, 63, 166, 217, 395; for the *via negativa* PRRD, III, 54, 148, 166, 213, 217, 220, 225-226, 235, 294, 297, 299-300, 328, 338, 353, 552, IV, 287; and for the *via eminentiae*, PRRD, III, 34, 47, 63, 71, 150, 166, 175, 203, 213, 217, 220, 225, 294-295, 297, 299, 328, 338, 346, 395, 552.

⁵³⁸ From my perspective, however, in each of these instances, however, this was simply assumed, and in none of them it was argued that this was the case.

⁵³⁹ See for this a.o., Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*. He heralds Aquinas throughout, and severely criticizes the contrary take and stand of neo-Calvinists, like Herman Dooyeweerd and Cornelius Van Til.

⁵⁴⁰ See Muller, PRRD, I, 271, Footnote 4, where he refers to a variety of publications.

⁵⁴¹ Douma, CG, 234-260, 272-279. Douma fights the battle on two fronts. He extensively takes Barth to task who objects to both natural knowledge and natural theology (with Muller). But he equally opposes the view that Calvin and Scripture endorse both (versus Muller). His verdict is crystal clear. “Natural revelation” and “natural knowledge: “YES!” “Natural theology:” NO! This is to say, only *theological suppression* of natural knowledge that renders the suppressors inexcusable!

more than interesting to note that Muller reflects on Calvin's view under the heading of "natural knowledge." But when he proceeds to the post-Reformers he shifts to "natural theology." As if they are "horses of the same color!" It has all the appearance that with this he equates the "natural knowledge" (of Calvin) with the "natural theology" of Reformed orthodoxy. This is a fundamental error. Yes, there is "natural theology" of sorts among apostate unbelievers. They have no choice. They must and do account for the natural knowledge that they possess. But when they account for it, they are always erroneous due to their inevitable suppression of the truth, which calls for immediate repentance (So Paul in Acts).⁵⁴² On the other hand, when they suppress the truth in practical atheism, they knowingly end up as rebellious, as wicked, and as vile, as they possibly can (Rom 1:21-31, esp. 24, 26, 28ff).

To top this off, there is not a trace of evidence that Scripture even mentions the possibility of a "natural theology" that is specific to the regenerate, let alone mentions its reality. All the data that Scripture divulges about the natural knowledge of God, which is common to all mankind is, by definition, part of "revealed knowledge." Further, all the Scriptural data of this revealed knowledge that are systematized by theology is revealed theology. Finally, the use of this theology for general illuminating or specific apologetic purposes is the use of revealed data. Hence a so-called natural theology apart from revealed data does not even come into play. In fact, this is admitted by its staunchest proponents. What they call "natural" theology of the regenerate is simply systematization of revealed data. Hence such "natural" theology does not exist. Without Scripture, Reformed orthodoxy would not have been able to give it any content. Regardless, the disjunction and therewith the discontinuity between Calvin who does not give any indication that natural theology is an option and post-Reformation orthodoxy that seeks to affirm this is undeniable. Further, the thesis that Calvin "egged" his theological offspring on to "hatch" a natural regenerate theology is not and cannot be substantiated.

Second, the same discontinuity does and must emerge with a view to the introduction of the archetypal-ectypal distinction and the use of the three *viae*. Both are unthinkable apart from the apostate philosophical Platonian/Aristotelian/Plotinian dialectic that made its way into the content scholasticism of Aquinas through Pseudo-Dionysius. This, subsequently, entered post-Reformation orthodoxy when some of its representatives,

⁵⁴² See Timothy Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Viking, 2015), 100-101, "Paul quotes Aratus, who says of God, 'we are his offspring' (Acts 17:28) ... However, in the very next sentence Paul argues, 'Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should *not* think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-an image made by human design or skill'" (Acts 17:29) ... In short, Paul takes some of his listeners' right beliefs and uses them to criticize their wrong beliefs in the light of the Scripture. He shows them that their beliefs fail the test of their own premises." This excellent assessment recognizes that for Paul discontinuity trumps continuity. Of course, hence his insistence upon repentance. For him, it is "yes, BUT" ... Quite in line with Rom. 1:18! But this assessment is clouded (somewhat?) by the further comments that Paul "accommodates in order to love and to confront at the same time. By affirming people's better impulses, by granting insights where he finds them, by adopting concepts and ways of reasoning that they can understand, Paul is not merely seeking to refute them, but also to respect them." Of course, that Paul is motivated in his evangelistic outreach by "the love of Christ" toward his hearers at all times is incontestable (2 Cor. 5:14). Further, that he is in total agreement with Peter that his apologetics must be "respectful" is hardly open to doubt as well (1 Pet. 3:15c; see also 2 Tim. 2:25). But to read both into the *text* of Acts 17 is questionable. Paul does not just "lovingly accommodate." Nor does he just "respectfully affirm a better impulse" or just "grant an insight." From God's perspective the "beliefs" of unbelievers are not "right," but "willy-nilly" in the light of their fundamental and rebellious suppression. So, to give them any "credit" is essentially to wrap discontinuity in continuity and push it into the background, if not have it subtly vanish from sight to whatever extent. It also would mitigate Paul's clarion call to radical and total repentance. In him discontinuity has clearly so much the overarching, if not final word that it cannot, may not, and should not be softened or toned down. When both "Christ's love" and "respect for the image of God," whether in the outright evangelist or in the focused apologist, are fully operational, they will not take the edge of their message, just like a surgeon worth his salt cannot and will not see, let alone verbalize any light in the darkness of terminal cancer. In both instances the condition is grim, in fact, unto death. The evangelist or apologist will both *weep* over the enemies of the cross (Phil. 3:18; see also 1 Cor. 1:23) and seek to *convict* as an instrument in the hand of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8; see also Peter's evangelistic apologetics in Acts 2:36-38; Stephen's in Acts 7:51-53; and Paul's in Acts 17:30. No current apologetic methodology comes even close. It is no coincidence that Paul Helm alerts us in no uncertain terms to the fact that not one of today's apologetic systems can trace its pedigree to the NT. Such system is either a legitimate man-made superstructure or it seeks to replace "the inerrant original" with an all too human substitute. Candidly, I (am more than inclined to) opt for the latter. Today's apologetic methodologies that without exception seek to arrive at "an agreement of the mind" regardless the nature of their arguments simply cannot hold a candle to the biblical one that convicts and goes after a repentant submission of the heart).

originally steeped in Thomism were soundly converted and embraced Calvin's theology, but failed to shed some (much?) of the content scholasticism in which they were schooled. This is evidenced in their continuing embrace of thought patterns, such as the archetypal-ectypal distinction and the use of the three *viae*. As a result, these thought patterns are "alive and well" up to the present day.

Muller does an extensive and excellent job to describe how this archetypal-ectypal distinction functions in post-Reformation orthodoxy.⁵⁴³ The long and the short of it is that "the divine archetype is the ultimate and essential foundation of theology" and "Scripture the divinely and therefore authoritatively and infallibly given cognitive foundation of theology." This goes with the twofold understanding that "the archetype is the higher science that supplies the principles used as the basis of conclusions in the ectypal subalternate science," and "that the archetype cannot be known in and of itself, but only through a gracious self-revelation," that is, in Scripture which turns the latter in "the *principium cognoscendi*."⁵⁴⁴ Muller does make mention of the non-negotiable conviction of some orthodox theologians that the distinction serves no purpose, in fact, should be scuttled since the "archetype" is beyond both our pay-scale and our jurisdiction.⁵⁴⁵ Still, he gives scant, if any attention to the underlying reason for their opposition. This opposition was uncompromising, as we saw, because it had everything to do with the heartbeat of the Reformation which insists on the Scriptures of the OT and NT as the ultimate, sole, and exclusive *principium cognoscendi*, not to be contaminated with any additional concepts or observations. Muller, as we saw, admits that the archetypal-ectypal distinction is not found in the Reformers.⁵⁴⁶ But he is nevertheless of the conviction that this distinction extrapolates legitimately (and logically?) from what is already present in Calvin in seed form. Here our assessments go respectfully in opposite directions. From my perspective Calvin would have fully concurred with the "opposition," in fact, would have championed it. "As is," there is neither any evidence nor a legitimate place for the scholastic archetypal-ectypal distinction in the oeuvre of John Calvin because of his uncompromising and uncompromisable stance not to yield a nano-inch in honoring the *Sola in Sola Scriptura* to the full. Nor does it and should have it a place in the thinking of anyone who in earnest follows in Calvin's footsteps.

To be sure, both the Reformers and the Reformed orthodox are stellar in their official insistence upon the *Sola Scriptura* principle. This must be forcefully underscored. But it escapes the Reformed orthodox that the archetypal-ectypal distinction as it functions in their theology, resonating Medieval scholasticism,⁵⁴⁷ essentially compromises this fundamental principle, whether its past and present proponents were or are conscious of this or not. It simply does not make any sense to state (with Muller) that the *unknown and unknowable* "archetype" is *made known* by God's "gracious self-revelation." When some of the Reformed orthodox essentially argued that this is a self-defeating statement and adamantly barred the content of an unknown and unknowable reality from any, and all acceptable theological considerations, they did not get the hearing that they deserved.

Muller also reports at length about the place and function of the three *viae* of scholasticism in post-Reformation orthodoxy.⁵⁴⁸ Here is his assessment. The *via causalitatis* focuses on the "relative attributes of God," how he relates to his creatures," and argues that "the cause can be known in some manner from its effects, and that we can ascend (sic!) from secondary causes to the first cause (Ps. 94:9). The *via negativa* hones in on God's "negative attributes," and "removes from him the imperfections known from creatures." The *via eminentiae* concentrates on God's "positive attributes"

⁵⁴³ See Muller, PRRD, I, 225, 229, 232, 234-236, 249, 251, 255, 258, 269, 335, 449, esp., 225-232, for archetypal theology, and 114, 116-117, 152, 225-226, 229, 233-238, 250, 255, 258, 266, 268, 282, 297, 311, 314, 349, 352, 404, 432-433, 443, for ectypal theology.

⁵⁴⁴ Muller, PRRD, I, 433; III, 159, 165.

⁵⁴⁵ Muller, PRRD, I, 232.

⁵⁴⁶ Muller, PRRD, I, 433.

⁵⁴⁷ Muller, PRRD, I, 227, identifies as one of its "Medieval antecedents" the Duns Scotus distinction of "*theologia in se* (God's self-knowledge) and *theologia nostra* (our knowledge of God)." So far, so good. However, it becomes more than questionable when we are told that "the essential knowledge of God, such as only can be known by God himself must remain *in large part* (italics, mine) beyond any and all finite knowing." The "secrets" of God are apparently open to "some" successful "prying." When Muller identifies this as an "antecedent" to the "archetypal-ectypal distinction," both are ostensibly in the same ballpark.

⁵⁴⁸ Once again, for the *via causalitatis*, see Muller, PRRD, III, 63, 166, 217, 395; for the *via negativa* PRRD, III, 54, 148, 166, 213, 217, 220, 225-226, 235, 294, 297, 299-300, 328, 338, 353, 552, IV, 287; and for the *via eminentiae*, PRRD, III, 34, 47, 63, 71, 150, 166, 175, 203, 213, 217, 220, 225, 294-295, 297, 299, 328, 338, 346, 395, 552.

and attributes to him all of the perfections known from creatures.”⁵⁴⁹ However, it should be quite clear that at this point a decisive difference with Calvin emerges. The latter’s commitment-in-full to the *Sola Scriptura* as the exclusive, all-overarching, and all-governing umbrella or *principium cognoscendi*, that *as such* cannot be known by and of itself, but only through God’s condescending self-revelation that is not and cannot be truly embraced apart from the regenerating grace of the Spirit, simply did not, does not, will not, and cannot allow any bottom-up type of theologizing, a procedure that dominated the Aristotelian/Plotinian/Dionysian infected Thomism.

So, once it is established that Calvin does indeed insist on an a natural *knowledge*, but does *not* allow for a natural *theology*, other than a truth-suppressing *theologia falsa* (not even a regenerate one which he supposedly either extracted, or for which he allegedly paved the way, from Scripture) and does *not* theologize from the bottom-up, we must come to the conclusion that he could not and therefore did not resort either to the archetypal-ectypal distinction or to the usage of the three *viae*. Hence, I cannot come to any other assessment than that in the relationship between Calvin, on the one hand, and Medieval scholasticism and Post-Reformation scholasticism, on the other hand, neither does discontinuity always fully trump continuity, nor vice versa, does continuity always fully override discontinuity. In both instances we face a more intriguing state of affairs. On the one hand, Calvin rejects in principle the *metaphysical* Medieval content-scholasticism and in practice does not pave the way to the similar content-scholasticism of post-Reformation orthodoxy, even when he throughout uses and thereby endorses the “logical” method-scholasticism that is also prevalent in Reformed orthodoxy. In short, he does not operate in the same expository, systematic, and apologetic ballpark. Even where the verdict regarding the nature and content of the “doctrinal game balls” would be completely unanimous, clearly with certain tenets of Medieval scholasticism, such as the Trinity, and even more so with Post-Reformation orthodoxy (continuity, with Muller), the “game” itself is too often and in too many regards “played” according to different rules (discontinuity, versus Muller). On the other hand, the iconic authors in Reformed orthodoxy, something that Muller emphasizes repeatedly, are far from unanimous in establishing the exact boundary between continuity and discontinuity. In fact, at times they differ sharply from each other.

On balance, my thesis is that Calvin would not (could not possibly?) have felt himself at home with the post-Reformation extrapolations that had more in common with the Medieval scholastics than with the Reformers. Hence my plea is simple. Let us exclusively hold on to Calvin’s Reformation

⁵⁴⁹ Muller, PRRD, III, 166. See also R. Wielockx, “Henry of Ghent,” in CPMA, 299-30; Louis Dupre and Nancy Hudson, “Nicholas of Cusa,” in CPMA, 468. For Cusanus the *via negativa* leads to “*learned* ignorance” that faces the “coincidence of opposites.” Only “the mind’s symbolizing activity” can span the gap between “the totally ineffable Gd” and “finite reality.” The contrastive view is in crystal clear evidence, indicative of a content-scholasticism that stands in need of repentance, and therefore should be radically and totally unacceptable to believers, both in academia and outside of it. What if academics do not alert the *hoi polloi* on the outside that all “ideas,” inclusive this one has consequences, at times deleteriously so. The “contrastive” view is one of those “ideas” that has infected the totality of society, which is filled from top to bottom with conflicts and acts of war. The only conclusion can be that the Academy, including the content-scholastic one, has failed to be the “watchman” it should have been. In fact, at times (often?) even issued contrastive “siren songs,” whether in the often competing and therefore shrill base, tenor, alto, or soprano mode. Time and again, it had to be rescued by the *hoi polloi*, such as in the Reformation. They often knew instinctively that “the Ship of the Academy,” including its Christian segment, had lost its moorings and that “the Train of Society,” including the Church segment, had gone off the track. Possibly the first and most incisive known and recorded impact of the *hoi polloi* may have been on display in ancient Antioch where their Holy Spirit spontaneity resulted in a Mother Church for all the world to come (Acts). The Reformation, frankly, was not far behind. Whatever my readers think of “my diagnostic take,” as expressed in this Footnote, everyone should take a stab at investigating why “the gold has darkened.” If they don’t like mine, they must look for and come up with an alternative diagnosis and the cure that corresponds with it. Mine is the Triadic New Covenantal Gospel in terms of its Message and its Apologetics that seeks to effect a heart transplant in regeneration, with all that flows forth from this, as the only remedy to remove theoretical and practical contrasts and so produces harmony and peace. In fact the shalom that covers the waterfront of life in abject submission to God and his Word, through the Spirit of God, by the grace of God, and to the glory of God! No more toleration of “business as usual!”

doctrines and theological method, and distance ourselves from any, and all Aristotelian infected *content* scholasticism of whatever sort, whether Medieval or post-Reformation, and refuse to re-introduce it, let alone recommend it for use today. It essentially vitiates the *Sola et Tota Scriptura* principle, whether intentionally or not. And what is just as significant, if not more so, exclusive scholasticism by and large aims to lay out truth unto mental agreement rather than proclaim it with a view to repentant faith and believing repentance unto submission and obedience. When it is sent into the world it may be very much alive. But if it is not met with repentant faith and turns into obedient action, it sooner or later will end up as “death in the pot.” Church history has proven this to be the case beyond any reasonable doubt! This should serve today as the proverbial “handwriting on the wall!”⁵⁵⁰ The already mentioned heart’s “cry” of Thomas a Kempis to “leave the difficult way of dispute,” and not “to search into things beyond them,” but rather “in radical devotion” to go “forward on the level, firm path of God’s commandments” (Deut. 29:29) applies to the scholastic post-Reformation orthodoxy as much as it did to the Medieval one.⁵⁵¹ Of course (to our shame ?), it applies to all non-scholastic orthodoxy as well.

⁵⁵⁰ See for this also, I. John Hesselink, *On Being Reformed* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1983), 32-33, “In the 17th Century the leading Lutheran and Reformed theologians used the Thomistic-Aristotelian approach in developing, refining, and to some extent deadening the dynamic theology of the 16th century reformers ... But for all its (method-scholastic) virtues this side of theological thinking has also produced some unfortunate by-products. Call theological systems rely to some extent on philosophical foundations ... In the case of the Protestant scholastics, it is increasingly felt that they unwittingly depended too much on neo-Aristotelian, Thomistic presuppositions which affected not only their method but also their message ... The result is a static, rigid dogmatism and a dead orthodoxy. Despite all protestations to the contrary, in effect, scripture and faith are replaced by reason and logic.” Muller did and would regard and describe this 1983 assessment, with some justification, as “over the top,” and long since discredited. See for this also, in the Lutheran orbit, Jordan Cooper, *Prolegomena: A Defense of the Scholastic Method* (The Weidner Institute, 2020). But both a deeper and more transcendental analysis than Muller presents, as well as the course of Church History, appears at least to suggest that there is more than just a grain of truth in Hesselink’s assessment.

⁵⁵¹ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 139.

Postscript

Let me in this Postscript summarize the heartbeat of the present volume as well as what I perceive to be the proper negative as well as positive implications of this heart beat and conclude with covering some consequences arising from this.

ONE

The heartbeat is threefold.

First, the *sine qua non* for the theological enterprise to be acceptable to God and effective among men is a radical and unreserved commitment to the complementarity of truth, which (1) does not and cannot reside in its twofold fullness in the finite mind of man, but (2) does and must require a regenerate heart to function as its only possible lodging place and its consequent cognitive, volitional, and emotional tranquility and peace.

Second, the hallmark of a theological endeavor that has the approval and smile of God is a concentrated pursuit of a systematic and apologetic theology that is uncompromisingly marked by the unswerving refusal (1) to penetrate the incomprehensible essential “secrets” of God to make them intelligible to the human mind to whatever extent and (2) to demand that God disclose his plainly forbidden “secrets” to the satisfaction of the human mind.

Third, the only way to be delightful to God and to ensure a future under the smile of his approval is (1) the complementary incessant focus upon the practice of godliness in obedience to Divine ethics that reaches its zenith in Christ’s Triple Command as “the only thing needful” and (2) to pursue this ardently in the present world as fellow-laborers of the Father (1 Cor. 3:9), ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) and servants of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6), preparatory to and aiming at the Grand Finale of the unending worshipful company of the Triune God by an innumerable multitude.

Commented [HK10]:

TWO

All the theologies mentioned in this volume were reviewed, whether successfully or not, either positively or negatively by and to the extent that they appeared to honor or dishonor this threefold measuring tape or yardstick, whether consciously or not.

Negatively, the application inevitably disqualified the pursuit and use of the archetype-construct, the *via causalitatis-negationis-eminetiae* triad, as well as the equivocity-analogy-univocity triad in one’s Systematic and Apologetic Theology. Imported from a philosophy type that Paul identified as “futile fraudulence,” this threesome was central in the scholastic bottom-up type of Systematic Theology that was meant to double as an Apologetics. As such, it fell for the essentially contrastive apostate *philosophoumenon* of “the One and the Many.” It further violated the twofold *Sola/Tota Scriptura* epistemological principle that the Reformation embraced as foundational for all knowledge acquisition in the theological enterprise. Hence the urgent recommendation and plea to keep a safe distance from all three paradigms.

Positively, the application of this yardstick prompted the urgent call to recognize and celebrate Christ's Triple Command as "the only thing needful," *and* laid out concrete ways and practical means to equip all God's people as the *Militia Dei* with a view to the implementation of this Command, be it in summary form. Both were designed to arrive at a proper vision of, *and* to enable them to do the "Greater Works" as promised and mandated by the Church's Commander-in-Chief (John 14:). The awesome *quantity* and *quality* of these "Works" would *mirror* and *extol* "the infinite and unbounded ocean of glory," that is wrapped up in the "first order" *Simplicitas Dei*, as it exists *ad intra* in eternity *and* is put on *ad extra* display in its "second order" counterpart in time. These "Revival-Works" always were, always are, and always will be clearly visible somewhere on Planet Earth (Mt. 16:18). Candidly, it would be the height of irony to be enthusiastic about this "assurance," as many undoubtedly are, but to miss their "hands-on-presence," as too often may be the case. Further, the awe-inspiring *realization* and *grandeur* of these "Works" are guaranteed by the "first order" *Immutabilitas Dei* as the hallmark of his plan and purpose in eternity *and* as the trademark of its "second order" complement in time. This adorns God's efficacious self-disclosure in his Word that will always accomplish its intended objective (Is. 55:11). As such, both the *Simplicitas* and *Immutabilitas Dei* secure the intermediate stage of the "Greater Works" as the appointed way and the prescribed means to culminate in the Grand Exhibition of God's Triune glory and the Sum-total of his Perfections.

THREE

The appointed way are God's people, and the appointed means is God's (New Covenant) Gospel. For a starter, through union with Christ God's people have received his heart in regeneration (1 Pet 1:3), and therewith (John 3:3) a *new vision* that makes them see Christ for the first time, and *with it* all others as, first of all, "saved or lost" (1 Cor. 5:16). Further, they have received his imputed righteousness in justification (2 Cor. 5:21), and therewith, a *new passion* that makes them apply to be sent out (Is. 6:7-8). Finally, they have received his imparted holiness in sanctification (Hebr. 10:10, 14) and therewith a *new mission*, with which they pursue Christ's Triple Command (Mt. 28:19-20). This Triad of a new 20-20 vision, a new empowering passion and a new hand's mission, and only this Triad, is "proof-positive" that they "get" the threefold Gospel on a heart's level. Armed with this Triad they will proceed with the "proclamation" of the threefold Gospel, in whatever way, even if they must share each of its three "prongs" of this Gospel a million times until their hearers show the same consequent Triad as *their* "proof positive" that *they* "get" it as well. Only then will the Gospel be graced with new "recruits," to be equipped as "new "soldiers," and (be able to) stay its conquering course. In a "culture" with less than 10% of Church members "out there" and only a fraction of its leaders "doing the work of an evangelists" to "full-orb" their ministry (2 Tim. 4:5), one may well ask whether they really "get" the Gospel, regardless their well-formulated mental agreement or their exquisite theological precision

FOUR

Candidly, it is my hope and prayer that any critique of this volume will start with biblically analyzing and assessing the threefold measuring tape or yardstick. To me this yardstick, based on Deuteronomy 29:29 is not negotiable. Since it is part of God's inerrant Word, to

treasure it in one's heart with the specific purpose to stay away from any, and all sin, and to pursue any, and all holiness is the only way to enjoy the "smile of God's delight" (Ps. 119:11). However, I am more than willing to correct or retract any of the negative or positive applications that are brought to my attention and prove to be misinformed, misguided, or simply mistaken. I am more than willing, in fact, eager to be part of a United Front to advance the Kingdom with anyone who embraces the heartbeat of this volume in word and in deed, regardless possible differences in the details of its application, and seeks to follow in the footsteps of so many "heroic being-willing-to-be-martyrs" in Church History, who fully put themselves and their ministerial lives on the line in a Paul-like fashion (Phil. 3:10) in the all-encompassing and all-overriding heartfelt pursuit of the "Greater Works" mandated in the Grand Triple Command of our joint Commander-in-Chief.

FIVE

Paul's exclamation, "For me to live my life and my aspirations is Christ, Christ alone and Christ total, and to die is the greatest possible gain" (Phil. 1:21) said and says it all. He listened to his and our Master (John 12:24), imitated him (2 Cor. 4:10-12; Col 2:24), testified that many followed very effectively in his footsteps (1 Thess. 1:6-8), and summons all of us to follow suit (1 Cor. 9:16b; 10:32-11:1), whether taking up our cross and losing our lives in self-denial leads to actual martyrdom or not. The fear of martyrdom may never be a deterrent. Rather the very idea of martyrdom should remind us that both in Scripture and in History the Church that was under the gun in times of persecution was more evangelistic and more effective in its outreach than in any other circumstances. Most likely because it removed the dross of all "fifth columns," and forced (?) its witness into the open for everyone to see and hear!

Irony of ironies, Satan undoubtedly rejoiced when he gained what he thought was his greatest victory, the death of Christ on the cross. Little did he know at that time of self-congratulation that it would turn into his greatest and all-decisive defeat. History repeats itself again and again in days of martyrdom. The more he savors victories of that kind, the more he sets himself up for further defeats. It is martyrdom above anything else that makes the "gates of hell" crumble (Mt. 16:18; Rev. 6:9). After all, when, and only when a seed dies, will it produce fruit (John 12:24)! May the Church, despite minor disagreements and all, perennially aim and succeed to take up its cross (Mk. 8:34-35) in order effectively to bring forth an abundant fruit of "souls" and "holiness" (John 15:2) by prayerfully abiding in our Lord Christ (John 15:5) in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father (John 15:8).

SIX

Finally, let me conclude with expressing a profound threefold hope that, I believe, should "spring eternal" across the length and breadth of Christ's Church. The first hope is that theologians who do, did, or had to come to the regrettable eye-opening conclusion that too much of their undertakings, whether consciously or not, grievously erred in spending loads of time and energy in canvassing or covering God's essential or out-of-bounds secrets at the injurious expense or neglect of the pursuit of God's revealed "ethics," will decisively opt for a dramatic change of course, whether in necessary repentance or in continuing faith. The second hope is that any Bible teacher or Bible expositor on whatever level, professor, pastor,

parent, or partner, will have the unshakable conviction that the formulation of doctrine and the presentation of truth may never be or remain “mere” theology or “mere” exposition. For both to come into their own it must spell out in detail the commensurate “obedience of faith.” The third hope is that all recipients of “truth for life,” whether readers, listeners, or partners, will not only be summoned, but also be stirred to the promised and mandated God-fearing and efficacious action that incontestably is to be verified in the Judgment (Mt. 12:37; 16:27). This may mean “to start from scratch” (2 Cor. 13:5), “to restart” (Gal. 1:6), “to pick up where one left off” (Hebr. 10:38), to “speed up” (Hebr. 5:11-13; 6:12), or “to stay and continue on the straight and narrow until the end (Hebr. 6:11; 10:36). But it always did, always does, and always will mean “to transcend and move beyond what has been accomplished already (Phil. 3:13-15; Hebr. 3:13). In a word, on this terrestrial ball “Enough Is *NEVER* Enough!” This statement is clearly part of, if not central to an incomprehensible complementarity of truth that only fits into the regenerate heart! Bishop Usher “got it right” when he exclaimed with his last breath, “Oh, my sins of omission! Oh, my sins of omission!!”

Unless this admitted “rarity” becomes “common place,” the Church may well in for the “rough ride” Peter is talking about. It is hard to imagine that he places the burden of looming judgment on a Church that is already suffering the heavy pressure and affliction of unrelenting persecution. But he does! “The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17) to indicate that salvation is by the skin of one’s teeth from a human point of view (1 Pet. 4:17-18), however abundant from God’s perspective (2 Pet. 1:11). This is undoubtedly to keep them riveted upon being a fully functioning Church (1 Pet. 5:1-5), displaying ever-present humility in the gracious face of an exalting and caring God (1 Pet. 5:6-7), and exhibiting constant vigilance and measurable victory in the threatening face of a roaring and brutalizing Enemy (1 Pet. 5:8-9).